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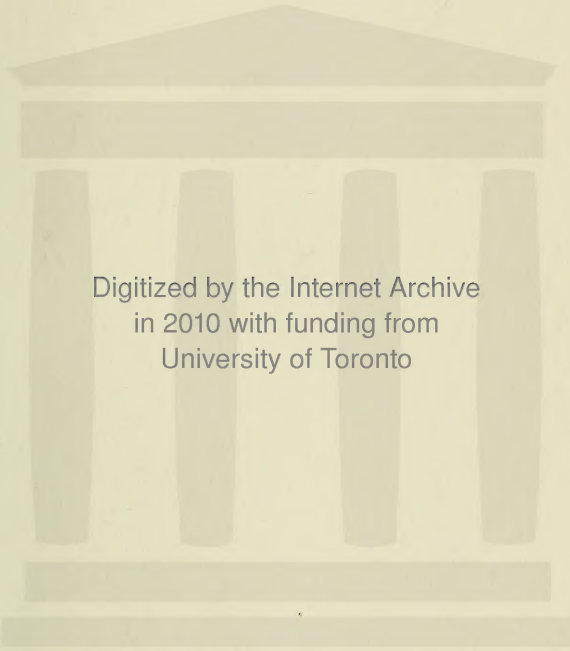


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LITERATURE
IN THE MAKING

LITERATURE IN THE MAKING

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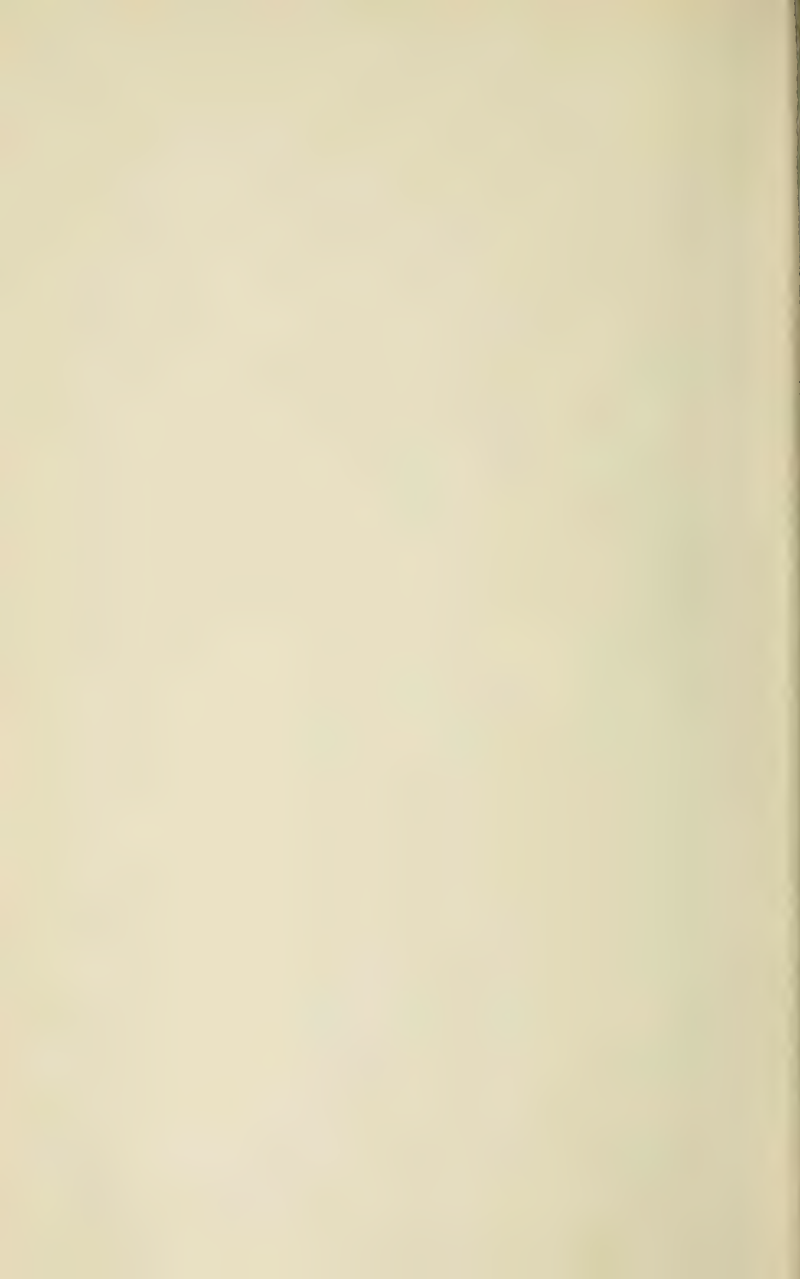


LITERATURE IN THE MAKING

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TO
LOUIS BEVIER, PH.D., LITT.D.
AND
LOUIS BEVIER, JR.



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William Dean Howells, the foremost American novelist of his generation, was born at Martin's Ferry, Ohio, March 11, 1837. Most of his many novels have been realistic and sympathetic studies of contemporary American life. For some years he has written "The Editor's Easy Chair" in *Harper's Magazine*. He has received honorary degrees from Harvard, Yale, Oxford, and Columbia, and in 1915 the National Institute of Arts and Letters awarded him its Gold Medal "For distinguished work in fiction." *The Daughter of the Storage* and *Years of My Youth* are his latest books.

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Kathleen Norris was born in San Francisco, California, July 16, 1880. She is the wife of Charles Gilman Norris, himself a writer and the brother of the late Frank Norris. Among Mrs. Norris's best-known novels are *Mother*, *The Story of Julia Page*, and *The Heart of Rachel*.

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Booth Tarkington was born in Indianapolis, Indiana, July 29, 1869. A prolific and brilliant writer, he has scored many successes of different types, being the author

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Montague Glass was born at Manchester, England, July 23, 1877. Coming in his youth to the United States, he brought into American fiction a new type—that of the metropolitan Jewish-American business man. His *Potash and Perlmutter* and *Abe and Mawruss* have given him a European as well as an American reputation.

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Robert W. Chambers was born in Brooklyn, New York, May 26, 1865. One of the most widely read writers of his time, he has given his attention chiefly to English and American society, making it the theme of a large number of novels, among which may be mentioned *The Fighting Chance*, *Japonette*, and *Athalie*.

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JAMES LANE ALLEN

James Lane Allen was born near Lexington, Kentucky, in 1849. In 1886 he gave up his profession of teaching

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HARRY LEON WILSON

Harry Leon Wilson was born in Oregon, Illinois, May 1, 1867. He was co-author with Booth Tarkington of *The Man from Home*, and his *Bunker Bean* and *Ruggles of Red Gap* have given him a great reputation for irresistible and peculiarly American humor.

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EDWARD S. MARTIN

Edward Sandford Martin was born in Willowbrook, Owasco, New York, January 2, 1856. His keen yet sympathetic observation of modern life finds expression in essays, many of which have been used editorially in *Life*. Several volumes of his essays have been published, among which may be mentioned *The Luxury of Children*, and *Some Other Luxuries* and *Reflections of a Beginning Husband*.

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ROBERT HERRICK

Robert Herrick was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts, April 26, 1868. He has been until recently a professor at the University of Chicago. He is a critic and a writer of realistic novels. *The Web of Life*, *The Common Lot*, *Together*, and *Clark's Field* are novels that show Mr. Herrick's questioning attitude toward some modern social institutions.

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Arthur Guiterman was born of American parents in Vienna, Austria, November 28, 1871. He is a writer of

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GEORGE BARR MCCUTCHEON

George Barr McCutcheon was born on a farm in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, July 26, 1866. He is a short-story writer and novelist, devoting himself chiefly to tales of adventure. *Beverley of Graustark* and the volumes that succeeded it have gained him many admirers among lovers of romance.

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FRANK H. SPEARMAN

Frank H. Spearman was born at Buffalo, New York, September 6, 1859. He is known both as a short-story writer and a writer of articles on economic topics. His novels are founded chiefly on themes dealing with the great industrial enterprises of the West, especially the railroads. The best known of these are *The Daughter of a Magnate* and *The Strategy of Great Railroads*.

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Will N. Harben, who was born in Dalton, Georgia, July 5, 1858, began his career in business in the South. His entrance into literature began with the assistant editorship of the *Youth's Companion*. He had gained a distinctive place as an interpreter of phases of Southern life in the company which includes Cable, Harris, and Johnston. His novels include *Pole Baker*, *Ann Boyd*, *Second Choice*, and many others.

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JOHN ERSKINE

John Erskine was born in New York City, October 5, 1879. He is Adjunct Professor of English at Columbia

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John Burroughs was born in Roxbury, New York, April 3, 1837. He taught school in his early years, and held for a time a clerkship in the United States Treasury. Since 1874 he has devoted himself to literature and fruit culture. Among his well-known "Nature" books may be noted *Wake Robin, Bird and Bough*, and *Camping and Tramping with Roosevelt*.

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Ellen Glasgow was born in Richmond, Virginia, April 22, 1874. Her novels, among which may be mentioned *The Voice of the People, The Romance of a Plain Man*, and *Life and Gabriella*, deal chiefly with social and psychological problems, and their scenes are for the most part in the southern part of the United States.

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FANNIE HURST

Fannie Hurst was born in St. Louis, October 19, 1889. She has served as a saleswoman and as a waitress and crossed the Atlantic in the steerage to get material for her short stories of the life of the working-woman, selections of which have been published with the titles *Just Around the Corner* and *Every Soul Hath Its Song*.

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AMY LOWELL

Amy Lowell was born in Brookline, Massachusetts, February 9, 1874. She is prominently identified with *vers libre, imagisme*, and other ultra-modern poetic tendencies. She has published a volume of essays on modern

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EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Edwin Arlington Robinson was born in Head Tide, Maine, December 22, 1869. He has written plays, but is chiefly known for his poems, most of them studies of character. His most recent volume is *Merlin: A Poem*.

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JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

Josephine Preston Peabody was born in New York City. She won the Stratford-on-Avon Prize for her poetic drama *The Piper*. She has published many books of verse, one of which, called *Harvest Moon*, deals chiefly with woman's tragic share in the Great War. She is the wife of Prof. Lionel Simeon Marks of Harvard.

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CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

Charles Rann Kennedy was born at Derby, England, February 14, 1871. His plays, dealing with social and religious questions, include *The Servant in the House*, *The Terrible Meek*, *The Idol-Breakers*, and *The Rib of the Man*, his latest work.

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PERCY MACKAYE

Percy Mackaye was born in New York City, March 16, 1875. He has written many poems and plays, and has been especially identified with the production of community pageants and masques, having written and directed the St. Louis Civic Masque in 1914, and the Shakespeare Masque in New York City in 1916. Among his published works may be mentioned *The Scarecrow*, *Jeanne d'Arc*, *Sappho and Phaon* and *Anti-Matrimony* (plays) and *Uriel and Other Poems*.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book is an effort to bridge the gulf between literary theory and literary practice. In these days of specialization it is more than ever true that the man who lectures and writes about the craft of writing seldom has the time or the inclination to show, by actual work, that he can apply his principles. On the other hand, the successful novelist, poet, or playwright devotes himself to his craft and seldom attempts to analyze and display the methods by which he obtains his effect, or even to state his opinion on matters intellectual and æsthetic.

Now, the professor of English and the literary critic are valuable members of society, and the development of literature owes much to their counsel and guardianship. But there is a special significance in the opinion which the writer holds concerning his own trade, in the advice which he bases upon his own experience, in the theory of

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life and art which he has formulated for himself.

Therefore I have spent considerable time in talking with some of the most widely read authors of our day, and in obtaining from them frank and informal statements of their points of view. I have purposely refrained from confining myself to writers of any one school or type of mind—the dean of American letters and the most advanced of our newest poetical anarchists alike are represented in these pages. The authors have talked freely, realizing that this was an opportunity to set forth their views definitely and comprehensively. They have not the time to write or lecture about their art, but they are willing to talk about it.

They knew that through me they spoke, in the first place, to the great army of readers of their books who have a natural and pleasing curiosity concerning the personality of the men and women who devote their lives to providing them with entertainment, and, in some cases, instruction. They knew that through me they spoke, in the second place, to all the literary apprentices of the country, who look eagerly for precept and example to those who have won fame by the de-

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lightful labor of writing. They knew that through me they spoke, in the third place, to critics and students of literature of our own generation and, perhaps, of those that shall come after us. How eagerly would we read, for instance, an interview with Francis Bacon on the question of the authorship of Shakespeare's plays, or an interview with Oliver Goldsmith in which he gave his real opinion of Dr. Johnson, Garrick, and Boswell! A century or so from now, some of the writers who in this book talk to the world may be the objects of curiosity as great.

The writers who have talked with me received me with courtesy, gave me freely of their time and thought, and showed a sincere desire for the furtherance of the purpose of this book. To them, accordingly, I tender my gratitude for anything in these pages which the reader may find of interest or of value. Their explanations of their literary creeds and practices were furnished in the first instance for the *New York Times*, to which I desire to express my acknowledgments.

JOYCE KILMER.

WAR STOPS LITERATURE

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

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WAR STOPS LITERATURE

WILLIAM DEAN HOWELLS

WAR stops literature. This is the belief of a man who for more than a quarter of a century has been in the front rank of the world's novelists, who wrote *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and *A Modern Instance* and nearly a hundred other sympathetic interpretations of American life.

Mr. William Dean Howells was the third writer to whom was put the question, "What effect will the Great War have on literature?" And he was the first to give a direct answer.

A famous French dramatist replied: "I am not a prophet. I have enough to do to understand the

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present and the past; I cannot concern myself with the future." A famous English short-story writer said, "The war has already inspired some splendid poetry; it may also inspire great plays and novels, but, of course, we cannot tell as yet."

But Mr. Howells said, quite simply, "War stops literature." He said it as unemotionally as if he were stating a familiar axiom.

He does not consider it an axiom, however, for he supplied proof.

"I have never believed," he said, "that great events produced great literature. They seldom call forth the great creative powers of man. In poetry it is not the poems of occasion that endure, but the poems that have come into being independently, not as the result of momentous happenings.

"This war does not furnish the poet, the novelist, and the dramatist with the material of literature. For instance, the Germans, as every one will admit, have shown extraordinary valor. But we do not think of celebrating that valor in poetry; it does not thrill the modern writers as such valor thrilled the writers of bygone centuries. When we think of the valor of the Germans, our emotion is not admiration but pity.

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“And the reason for this is that fighting is no longer our ideal. Fighting was not a great ideal, and therefore it is no longer our ideal. All that old material of literature—the clashing of swords, the thunder of shot and shell, the great clouds of smoke, the blood and fury—all this has gone out from literature. It is an anachronism.”

“But the American Civil War produced literature, did it not?” I asked.

“What great literature did it produce?” asked Mr. Howells in turn. “As I look back over my life and recall to mind the great number of books that the Civil War inspired I find that I am thinking of things that the American people have forgotten. They did not become literature, these poems and stories that came in such quantities and seemed so important in the sixties.

“There were the novels of J. W. De Forest, for instance. They were well written, they were interesting, they described some phases of the Civil War truthfully and vividly. We read them when they were written—but you probably have never heard of them. No one reads them now. They were literature, but that about which they were written has ceased to be of literary interest.

“Of course, the Civil War, because of its peculiar

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nature, was followed by an expansion, intellectual as well as social and economic. And this expansion undoubtedly had its beneficial effect on literature. But the Civil War itself did not have, could not have, literary expression.

“Of all the writings which the Civil War directly inspired I can think of only one that has endured to be called literature. That is Lowell’s ‘Commemoration Ode.’

“War stops literature. It is an upheaval of civilization, a return to barbarism; it means death to all the arts. Even the preparation for war stops literature. It stopped it in Germany years ago. A little anecdote is significant.

“I was in Florence about 1883, long after the Franco-Prussian War, and there I met the editor of a great German literary weekly—I will not tell you its name or his. He was a man of refinement and education, and I have not forgotten his great kindness to my own fiction. One day I asked him about the German novelists of the day.

“He said: ‘There are no longer any German novelists worthy of the name. Our new ideal has stopped all that. Militarism is our new ideal—the ideal of Duty—and it has killed our imagination. So the German novel is dead.’”

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"Why is it, then," I asked, "that Russia, a nation of militaristic ideals, has produced so many great novels during the past century?"

"Russia is not Germany," answered the man who taught Americans to read Turgenieff. "The people of Russia are not militaristic as the people of Germany are militaristic. In Germany war has for a generation been the chief idea of every one. The nation has had a militaristic obsession. And this, naturally, has stifled the imagination.

"But in Russia nothing of the sort has happened. Whatever the designs of the ruling classes may be, the people of Russia keep their simplicity, their large intellectuality and spirituality. And, therefore, their imagination and other great intellectual and spiritual gifts find expression in their great novels and plays.

"I well remember how the Russian novelists impressed me when I was a young man. They opened to me what seemed to be a new world—and it was only the real world. There is Tcheckoff—have you read his *Orchard*? What life, what color, what beauty of truth are in that book!

"Then there is Turgenieff—how grateful I am for his books! It must be thirty years since I first read him. Thomas Sargent Perry, of Boston, a

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man of the greatest culture, was almost the first American to read Turgenieff. Stedman read Turgenieff in those days, too. Soon all of the younger writers were reading him.

“I remember very well a dinner at Whitelaw Reid’s house in Lexington Avenue, when some of us young men were enthusiastic over the Russian novel, and the author we mentioned most frequently was Turgenieff.

“Dr. J. G. Holland, the poet who edited *The Century*, lived across the street from Mr. Reid, and during the evening he came over and joined us. He listened to us for a long time in silence, hardly speaking a word. When he rose to go, he said: ‘I have been listening to the conversation of these young men for over an hour. They have been talking about books. And I have never before heard the names of any of the authors they have mentioned.’”

“Were those the days,” I asked, “in which you first read Tolstoy?”

“That was long before the time,” answered Mr. Howells. “Tolstoy afterward meant everything to me—his philosophy as well as his art—far more than Turgenieff. Tolstoy did not love all his writing. He loved the thing that he wrote about,

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the thing that he lived and taught—equality. And equality is the best thing in the world. It is the thing for which the Best of Men lived and died.

“I never met Tolstoy,” said Mr. Howells. “But I once sent him a message of appreciation after he had sent a message to me. Tolstoy was great in the way he wrote as well as in what he wrote. Tolstoy’s force is a moral force. His great art is as simple as nature.”

“Do you think that the Russian novelists have influenced your work?” I asked.

“I think,” Mr. Howells replied, “that I had determined what I was to do before I read any Russian novels. I first thought that it was necessary to write only about things that I knew had already been written about. Certain things had already been in books; therefore, I thought, they legitimately were literary subjects and I might write about them.

“But soon I knew that this idea was wrong, that I must get my material, not out of books, but out of life. And I also knew that it was not necessary for me to look at life through English spectacles. Most of our writers had been looking at life through English spectacles; they had been closely following in the footsteps of English

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novelists. I saw that around me were the materials for my work. I saw around me life—wholesome, natural, human.

“I saw a young, free, energetic society. I saw a society in which love—the greatest and most beautiful thing in the world—was innocent; a society in which the relation between man and woman was simple and pure. Here, I thought, are the materials for novels. Why should I go back to the people of bygone ages and of lands not my own?”

“Do you think,” I asked, “that romanticism has lost its hold on the novelists?”

Mr. Howells smiled. “When realism,” he said, “is once in a novelist’s blood he never can degenerate into romanticism. Romanticism is no longer a literary force among English-speaking authors. Romanticism belongs to the days in which war was an aim, an ideal, instead of a tragic accident. It is something foreign to us. And literature must be native to the soil, affected, of course, by the culture of other lands and ages, but essentially of the people of the land and time in which it is produced. Realism is the material of democracy. And no great literature or art can arise outside of the democracy.”

Tolstoy was mentioned again, and Mr. Howells

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was asked if he did not think that the Russian novelist's custom of devoting a part of every day to work that was not literary showed that all writers would be better off if they were obliged to make a living in some other way than by writing. Mr. Howells gave his answer with considerable vigor. His calm, blue eyes lost something of their kindness, and his lips were compressed into a straight, thin line before he said:

"I certainly do not think so. The artist in letters or in lines should have leisure in which to perform his valuable service to society. The history of literature is full of heartbreaking instances of writers whose productive careers were retarded by their inability to earn a living at their chosen profession. The belief that poverty helps a writer is stupid and wrong. Necessity is not and never has been an incentive. Poverty is not and never has been an incentive. Writers and other creative artists are hindered, not helped, by lack of leisure.

"I remember my own early experiences, and I know that my writing suffered very much because I could not devote all my time to it. I had to spend ten hours in drudgery for every two that I spent on my real work. The fact that authors

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who have given the world things that it treasures are forced to live in a state of anxiety over their finances is lamentable. This anxiety cannot but have a restrictive influence on literature. It is not want, but the fear of want, that kills."

"Still, in spite of their precarious financial condition, modern authors are doing good work, are they not?" I asked.

"Certainly they are," answered Mr. Howells, "the novelists especially. There is Robert Herrick, for example. His novels are interesting stories, and they also are faithful reflections of American life. Will Harben's work is admirable. It has splendid realism and fine humor. Perhaps one thing that has kept it, so far, from an appreciation so general as it will one day receive, is the fact that it deals, for the most part, with one special locality, a certain part of Georgia.

"And in Spain—what excellent novelists they have there and have had for a long time! The realistic movement reached Spain long before it reached England and the United States. In fact, English-speaking countries were the last to accept it. I have taken great pleasure in the works of Armando Valdés. Then there are Pérez Galdós and Emilia Pardo Bazán, and that priest

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who wrote a realistic novel about Madrid society. All these novelists are realists, and realists of power.

"Then there are the great Scandinavians. I hope that I may some time attempt to express a little of my gratitude for the pleasure that Björnson's works have given me."

I asked, "What do you think of contemporary poetry?"

"I admired chiefly that of Thomas Hardy," said Mr. Howells. "His poems have force and actuality and music and charm. Masefield I like, with reservations. Three modern poets who give me great pleasure are Thomas Hardy, William Watson, and Charles Hanson Towne. The first one of Mr. Towne's poems that I read was 'Manhattan.' I have not forgotten the truth of that poetic interpretation of New York. His poems are beautiful and they are full of humanity. In his latest book there is a poem called 'A Ballad of Shame and Dread' that moved me deeply. It is a slight thing, but it is wonderfully powerful. Like all of Towne's poetry, it is warm with human sympathy."

"Do you think," I asked, "that the great social problems of the day, the feminine unrest,

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for instance, are finding their expression in literature?"

"No," said Mr. Howells, "I cannot call to mind any adequate literary expression of the woman movement. Perhaps this is because the women who know most about it and feel it most strongly are not writers. The best things that have been said about woman suffrage in our time have been said by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. She has written the noblest satire since Lowell. What wit she has, and what courage! Once I heard her address a meeting of Single-Taxers. Now, the Single-Taxers are all right so far as they go, but they don't go far enough. The Single-Taxers heckled her, but she had a retort ready for every interruption. She stood there with her brave smile and talked them all down."

"Do you think that Ibsen expressed the modern feminine unrest in *The Doll's House*?" Mr. Howells was asked.

"Ibsen seldom expressed things," was his reply. "He suggested them, mooted them, but he did not express them. *The Doll's House* does not express the meaning of unrest, it suggests it. Ibsen told you where you stood, not where to go."

Mr. Howells had recently presided at a meeting

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which was addressed by M. Brioux, and he expressed great admiration for the work of the French dramatist.

“He is a great dramatist,” he said. “He has given faithful reports of life, and faithful reports of life are necessarily criticisms of life. All great novels are criticisms of life. And I think that the poets will concern themselves more and more with the life around them. It is possible that soon we may have an epic in which the poet deals with the events of contemporary life.”

Mr. Howells is keenly awake to the effect which the war is having on conditions in New York. And in his sympathy for the society which inevitably must suffer for a war in which it is not directly concerned, the active interest of the novelist was evident. “If all this only could be reflected in a book!” he said. “If some novelist could interpret it!”

THE JOYS OF THE POOR

KATHLEEN NORRIS

THE JOYS OF THE POOR

KATHLEEN NORRIS

ANY young woman who desires to become a famous novelist and short-story writer like Kathleen Norris will do well to take the following steps: In the first place, come to New York. In the second place, marry some one like Charles Gilman Norris.

Of course, every one who read *Mother* and *The Rich Mrs. Burgoyne* and *Saturday's Child* knew that the author was a married woman—and also a married woman with plenty of personal experience with babies and stoves and servants and other important domestic items. But not until I visited Kathleen Norris at her very genuine home in Port Washington did I appreciate the part which that domestic item called a husband has played in Kathleen Norris's communications to the world.

I made this discovery after Charles Gilman

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Norris—accompanied by little Frank, who bears the name of the illustrious novelist who was his uncle—had motored me through Port Washington's pleasant avenues to the Norris house. Before a fire of crackling hickory logs, Kathleen Norris (clad in something very charming, which I will not attempt to describe) was talking about the qualities necessary to a writer's success. And one of these, she said, was a business sense.

Now, Mrs. Norris did not look exactly business-like. Nor is "a business sense" the quality which most readers would immediately hit upon as the characteristic which made the author of *Gayley the Troubadour* different from the writers of other stories. I ventured to suggest this to Mrs. Norris.

"I don't claim to possess a business sense," she said. "But my husband has a business sense. He has taken charge of selling my stories to the magazines and dealing with publishers and all of that. I do think that literally thousands of writers are hindered from ever reaching the public by the lack of business sense. And I know that my husband has been responsible for getting most of my work published. My stories have appeared since my marriage, you know. I don't need to have a business sense, all I have to do is to write

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the stories. My husband does all the rest—I don't need even to have any of the author's complacency, or the author's pride!"

Mrs. Norris's fame is only about five years old—about as old as her son. I asked her about her life before she was known as a writer, expecting to hear picturesque tales of literary tribulations among the hills of California. But her description of her journey to success was not the conventional one; her journey was not for years paved with rejection slips and illumined with midnight oil.

"It was New York that did it," she said. "When we first came to New York from California the editor of a magazine with which Mr. Norris was connected gave us a tea. Most of the people who were present were short-story writers and novelists. It was pleasant for me to meet them, and I enjoyed the afternoon. But my chief sensation was one of shock—it was a real shock to me to find that writers were people!

"I felt as if I had met Joan of Arc, Cæsar, Cleopatra, Alexander the Great, and all the great figures of history, and found them to be human beings like myself. 'These writers are not supermen and superwomen,' I said to myself, 'they are

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human beings like me. Why can't I do what they're doing?'

"I thought this over after we went home that evening. And I made a resolve. I resolved that before the next tea that I attended I would tell a story. And when I next went to a tea I had sold a story."

"To what publication had you sold it?" I asked.

"To an evening paper," said Mrs. Norris; "but I had written and sold a story. That was something; it meant a great deal to me. My first stories were all sold to this evening paper, for twelve dollars each. This paper printed a story every day, paying twelve dollars for each of them, and giving a prize of fifty dollars for the best story published each week. I won one of the fifty-dollar prizes."

Any one who to-day could buy a Kathleen Norris story for fifty dollars would be not an editor, but a magician. Yet the memory of that early triumph seemed to give Mrs. Norris real pleasure.

"I wrote *What Happened to Alanna* two years before the Fire," she said. ("The Fire" means only one thing when a Californian says it.) "But

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most of my stories have been written since I came to New York."

I asked Mrs. Norris for the history of one of her earliest stories, a story of California life which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly*. She said: "That story went to twenty-six magazines before it was printed. My husband had an alphabetical list of magazines. He sent the story first to the *Atlantic Monthly* and then to twenty-five other magazines. They all returned it. Then he started at the top of the list again, and this time the *Atlantic Monthly* accepted it."

The mention of Mr. Norris's activities in selling this story brought our conversation back to the subject of the "business sense."

"A writer needs the ability to sell a story as well as the ability to write it," said Mrs. Norris, "unless there is some one else to do the writing. Many a woman writes a really good story, sends it hopefully to an editor, gets it back with a printed notice of its rejection, and puts it away in a desk drawer. Then years later she tells her grandchildren that she once wanted to be an author, but found that she couldn't do it.

"Now, that is no way for a writer to gain success. The writer must be persevering, not only

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in writing, but in trying to get his work before the public. Unless, as I said, there is some one else to supply the perseverance in getting the work before the public.

“I think that the desire to write generally indicates the possession of the power to write. But young writers are too easily discouraged. But I have no right to blame a writer for being discouraged. I had frightful discouragement—until I was married.”

It is easy to see that Kathleen Norris does not hesitate to find in her own home life material for her industrious pen. Little Frank has undoubtedly served his mother as a model many times—which is not meant to indicate that he is that monstrosity, a model child. Indeed, Mrs. Norris believes that a novelist should use the material which lies ready at hand, instead of seeking for exotic and unusual topics. She sees that people want to read about the things with which they are already familiar, that they are not (as many young writers seem to think) eager for novelties.

“I cannot understand,” she said, “how it is that writers will clamor for recognition, and abuse the public for not welcoming them with enthusiasm, and yet will not give the public what they

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know that the public wants. So many people seem to want just their own sort of art, but to want money, too. Now, I wouldn't write for a million dollars some of those things that are called 'best sellers.' But I cannot see why a writer who is avowedly writing for the public should think it beneath him to treat the themes in which the public is interested. The greatest tragedy of literature is the writer who persists in trying to give the public what it does not want. Think of poor Gissing, for instance, dying embittered because he couldn't sell his work!"

Mrs. Norris's conviction that a writer should use the material around him is so strong that she seems actually to be pained by the thought of all the excellent things for stories that are going to waste. I asked her if literature ever could come from apartment-houses. She said:

"Of course it can! There is no reason why there shouldn't be good stories and novels of apartment-house life. One reason why we are not writing more and better stories of the life around us is because we are living that life so intensely—too intensely. We live in this country so close to our income that the problem of earning money makes us lose sight of the essentials of life. It

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would be a fine thing for us, mentally and spiritually, if we should live on less than we do. If, for example, a family that found it was in receipt of a few hundred dollars more a year than before should decide, therefore, to live under a simpler scale than before, to do away with some really worthless luxuries, what a fine thing that would be!"

Of course many young writers come to Mrs. Norris for advice. And some of them excellently illustrate the tendency which she deprecates, the tendency to write about the unknown instead of the familiar.

"I was talking the other day to a young girl of my acquaintance who is a costume model," she said. "She has literary aspirations. Now, her life itself has been an interesting story—her rise from a shopgirl to her present position. And every now and then she will say something to me that is a most interesting revelation—something that indicates the rich store of experience that she might, if she would, draw upon in her stories. On one occasion she said to me, 'I went home and put my shoe-drawer in order.'

"'What do you mean?' I asked. 'What is your shoe-drawer?'"

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“‘Why, my shoe-drawer!’ she answered. ‘You see, we costume models have to have a drawer full of shoes, because we must change our shoes to match every costume.’”

“‘Why is it,’ asked Mrs. Norris, ‘that a girl like that cannot see the value of such an incident as that? That shoe-drawer is a picturesque and interesting thing, unknown to most people. And this girl, who knows all about it, and wants to write, cannot see its literary value! And yet what more interesting subject is there for her to write about than that shoe-drawer? I do not see why writers will not appreciate the importance of writing about the things that are around them.’”

Mrs. Norris gave a somewhat embarrassed laugh. “‘I really shouldn’t attempt to lay down the law in this way,” she said. “‘I can speak only for myself—I must write of the people and things that I know best, but I ought not to attempt to prescribe what other people shall write about.’”

Mrs. Norris’s chief literary enthusiasm seems to be Charles Dickens. “‘When we were all infants out in the backwoods of California,” she said, “‘we batted on Dickens. Dickens and a writer whom I don’t suppose anybody reads nowadays—Henry Kingsley. The boys read Sir

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Walter Scott's novels, and left Dickens to me. I read Dickens with delight, and I still read him with delight. I have found passages in Dickens of which I honestly believe there are no equal in all English literature except in Shakespeare. I do not think that there is ever a year in which I do not read some of Dickens's novels over again. Of course, any one can find Dickens's faults—but I do not see how any one can fail to find his excellences."

"What is it in Dickens that especially attracts you?" I asked.

Mrs. Norris was silent for a moment. Then she said: "I think I like him chiefly because he saw so clearly the joys of the poor. He did not give his poor people nothing but disease and oppression and despair. He gave them roast goose and plum pudding for their Christmas dinner—he gave them faith and hope and love. He knew that often the rich suffer and the poor are happy.

"Many of the modern realists seem ignorant of the fact that the poor may be happy. They think that the cotter's Saturday night must always be squalid and sordid and dismal, and that the millionaire's Saturday night must be splendid and joyful. As a matter of fact, the poor family may

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be, and often is, healthier and happier in every way than the rich family. But these extreme realists are not like Dickens, they have not his intimate knowledge of the life of the poor. They have the outsider's viewpoint.

"Too many writers are telling us about the sorrows of the poor. We need writers who will tell us about the joys of the poor. We need writers who will be aware of the pleasures to be derived from a good dinner of corned beef and cabbage and a visit to a moving-picture theater. Often when I pass a row of mean houses, as they would be called, I think gratefully of the good times that I have had in just such places."

The thought of that little Celtic Californian reading Dickens among the redwood-trees appealed to me. So I asked Mrs. Norris to tell more about her childhood.

"Well," she said, "we hear a great deal about the misery, the bleak and barren lives of the children who live in the tenements of New York's lower East Side. But I think that an East Side tenement child would die of ennui if it should be brought up as we were brought up. We had none of the amusing and exciting experiences of the East Side child—we had no white stockings, no

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BOOTH TARKINGTON

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BOOTH TARKINGTON

MR. BOOTH TARKINGTON never will be called the George M. Cohan of fiction. His novel, *The Turmoil*, is surely an indictment of modern American urban civilization; of its materialism, its braggadocio, its contempt for the things of the soul.

It was with the purpose of making this indictment a little clearer than it could be when it is surrounded by a story, that I asked Mr. Tarkington a few questions. And his answers are not likely to increase our national complacencies.

In the first place, I asked Mr. Tarkington if the atmosphere of a young and energetic nation might not reasonably be expected to be favorable to literary and artistic expression.

"Yes, it might," said Mr. Tarkington. "There may be spiritual progress in America as phenomenal as her material progress.

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“There is and has been extraordinary progress in the arts. But the people as a whole are naturally preoccupied with their material progress. They are much more interested in Mr. Rockefeller than in Mr. Sargent.”

The last two sentences of Mr. Tarkington's reply made me eager for something a little more specific on that subject.

“What are the forces in America to-day,” I asked, “that hinder the development of art and letters?”

Mr. Tarkington replied: “There are no forces in America to-day that hinder the development of individuals in art and letters, save in unimportant cases here and there. But there is a spirit that hinders general personal decency, knows and cares nothing for beauty, and is glad to have its body dirty for the sake of what it calls ‘prosperity.’

“It ‘wouldn't give a nickel’ for any kind of art. But it can't and doesn't hinder artists from producing works of art, though it makes them swear.”

“But do not these conditions in many instances seriously hinder individual artists?”

Mr. Tarkington smiled. “Nothing stops an artist if he is one,” he said. “But many things

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may prevent a people or a community from knowing or caring for art.

“The climate may be unfavorable; we need not expect the Eskimos to be interested in architecture. In the United States politicians have usually controlled the public purchase of works of art and the erection of public buildings. This is bad for the public, naturally.”

“I suppose,” I said, “that the conditions you describe are distinctively modern, are they not? At what time in the history of America have conditions been most favorable to literary expression?”

Mr. Tarkington’s reply was not what I expected. “At all times,” he said. “Literary expression does not depend on the times, though the appreciation of it does, somewhat.”

I asked Mr. Tarkington if he agreed with Mr. Gouverneur Morris in considering the short story a modern development. He did not.

“There are short stories in the Bible,” he said, “and in every mythology; ‘folk stories’ of all races and tribes. Probably Mr. Morris’s definition of the short story would exclude these. I agree with him that short stories are better written nowadays.”

“But you do not believe,” I said, “that Ameri-

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can literature in general is better than it used to be, do you? Why is it that there is now no group of American writers like the New England group which included Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Emerson, and Thoreau?"

"Why is there," Mr. Tarkington asked in turn, "no group like Homer (wasn't he a group?) in Greece? There may be, but if there is just such a modern group it would tend only to repeat the work of the Homeric group, which wouldn't be interesting to the rest of us.

"The important thing is to find a group unlike Longfellow, Whittier, Lowell, Emerson, and Thoreau. That is, if one accepts the idea that it is important to find a group."

Mr. Tarkington's criticisms of the modern American city have been so severe that I expected him to tell me that all writers should live in the country. But again he surprised me. In reply to my question as to which environment was more favorable to the production of literature, the city or the country, he said:

"It depends upon the nerves of the writer. A writer can be born anywhere, and he can grow up anywhere."

There has recently been considerable discussion

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—Professor Edward Garnet and Gertrude Atherton have taken a considerable share in it—on the relative merits of contemporary English and American fiction. I asked Mr. Tarkington if in his opinion the United States had at the present time novelists equal to those of England.

“That is unanswerable!” he answered. “Writers aren’t like baseball teams. What’s the value of my opinion that *The Undiscovered Country* is a ‘greater’ novel than *A Pair of Blue Eyes*? These questions remind me of school debating societies. Nothing is demonstrated, but everybody has his own verdict.”

Until I asked Mr. Tarkington about it I had heard only two opinions as to the probable effect on literature of the war. One was that which William Dean Howells tersely expressed by saying: “War stops literature,” and the other was that the war is purifying and strengthening all forms of literary expression.

But Mr. Tarkington had something new to say about it. “What effect,” I asked, “is the war likely to have on American literature?”

“None of consequence,” he answered. “The poet will find the subject, war or no war. The sculptor doesn’t depend upon epaulets.”

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Mr. Tarkington is so inveterate a writer of serials, and his work is so familiar to the readers of the American magazines, that I desired to get his expert opinion as to whether or not the American magazines, with their remarkably high prices, had harmed or benefited fiction. His reply was somewhat non-committal.

“They have induced many people to look upon the production of fiction as a profitable business,” he said. “But those people would merely not have ‘tried fiction’ at all otherwise. Prices have nothing to do with art.”

Mr. Tarkington had some interesting things to say about that venerable mirage, the Great American Novel. I asked him if that longed-for work would ever be written; if, for example, there would ever be a work of fiction reflecting American life as *Vanity Fair* reflects English life. He replied:

“If Thackeray had been an American he would not have written a novel reflecting American life as *Vanity Fair* reflected the English life of its time. He would have written of New York; his young men would have come there after Harvard. The only safe thing to say of the Great American Novel is that the author will never know he wrote it.”

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Mr. Charles Belmont Davis had told me that a writer who had some means of making a living other than writing would do better work than one who devoted himself exclusively to literature. I asked Mr. Tarkington what he thought about this.

"I think," he said, "that it would be very well for a writer to have some means of making a living other than writing. There are likely to be times in his career when it would give him a sense of security concerning food. But I doubt if it would much affect his writing, unless he considered writing to be a business."

Mr. Tarkington's answer to my next question is hereby commended to the attention of all those feminine revolutionists who believe that they are engaged in the pleasant task of changing the whole current of modern thought.

"How has literature been affected," I asked, "by the suffrage movement and feminism?"

Mr. Tarkington looked up in some surprise. "I haven't heard of any change," he said.

The author of *The Turmoil* could never be accused of jingoism. But he is far from agreeing with those critics who believe that American literature is merely "a phase of English literature."

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I asked him if he believed that there was such a thing as a distinctively American literature.

“Certainly,” he replied. “Is *Huckleberry Finn* a phase? It’s a monument; not an English one. English happens to be the language largely used.”

The allusion in Mr. Tarkington’s last reply suggested—what every reader of *Penrod* must know—that this novelist is an enthusiastic admirer of Mark Twain. So I told him that Mr. T. A. Daly had classed Mark Twain with Artemus Ward and Q. K. Philander Doesticks, P. B., and had said that these men wrote nothing of real merit and were “the Charlie Chaplins of their time.”

Mr. Tarkington smiled. “Get Mr. T. A. Daly to talk some more,” he said. “We’d like to hear something about Voltaire and Flo Ziegfeld. Second thoughts indicate that ‘T. A. Daly’ is the pen name of Mr. Charlie Chaplin. Of course! And that makes it all right and natural. I thought at first that it was a joke.”

ROMANTICISM AND AMERICAN HUMOR

MONTAGUE GLASS

ROMANTICISM AND AMERICAN HUMOR

MONTAGUE GLASS

ONCE upon a time William Dean Howells leveled the keen lance of his satire against what he called "the monstrous rag baby of romanticism." In those simple days, literary labels were easily applied. A man who wrote about Rome, Italy, was a romanticist; a man who wrote about Rome, New York, was a Realist.

Now, however, a writer who finds his themes in the wholesale business district of New York City does not disavow the title formerly given exclusively to makers of drawn-sword-and-prancing-steed fiction. Montague Glass is a romanticist.

The laureate of the cloak-and-suit trade and biographer of Mr. Abe Potash and Mr. Mawruss Perlmutter does not believe that romance is a matter of time and place. A realistic novel, he believes, may be written about the Young Pre-

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tender or Alexander the Great, and a romance about—well, about Elkan Lubliner, American.

Of course, I asked him to defend his claim to the name of romanticist. He did so, but in general terms, without special reference to his own work. For this widely read author has the amazing virtue of modesty.

“I do not think,” he said, “that the so-called historical novelists are the only romanticists. The difference between the two schools of writers is in method, rather than in subject.

“A romanticist is a writer who creates an atmosphere of his own about the things with which he deals. He is the poet, the constructive artist. He calls into being that which has not hitherto existed.

“A realist, however, is a writer who faithfully reproduces an atmosphere that already exists. He reports, records; one of his distinguishing characteristics must be his attention to detail. The romanticist is as truthful as the realist, but he deals with a few large truths rather than with many small facts.”

“And you,” I said, determined to make the conversation more personal, “prefer the romantic method?”

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“Yes,” said Mr. Glass, “I do. I prefer to use the romantic method, and to read the works of the writers who use it. I believe that there is more value in suggestion than in detailed description. For instance, I do not think that my stories would gain vividness if I should put all the dialogue—I tell my stories chiefly by means of dialogues, you know—into dialect. So I do not put down the dialogue phonetically. I spell the words correctly, not in accordance with the pronunciation of my characters.

“This is not an invariable rule. When, for instance, Abe or Mawruss has learned a new long word which he uses frequently to show it off, he generally mispronounces it. He may say ‘quincidence’ for ‘coincidence.’ Such a mispronunciation as this I reproduce, for it has its significance as a revelation of character. But I do not attempt to put down all mispronunciations; I let the dialect be imagined.

“The romanticist, you see, uses his own imagination and expects imagination in his readers. His method might be called impressionistic; he outlines and suggests, instead of describing exhaustively. The romanticist really is more economical than the realist, and he has more restraint.”

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“Who are the leading romanticists of the day?” I asked.

“Well,” Mr. Glass replied, “my favorite among contemporary romanticists is Joseph Conrad. There is a man who is certainly no swashbuckling novelist of the Wardour Street school. He writes of modern life, and yet he is a romanticist through and through.

“I think that I may justly claim to be one of the first admirers of Conrad in America. I used to read him when apparently the only other man in this part of the world to appreciate him was William L. Alden, who praised him in the columns of the *New York Times Review of Books*.

“I well remember my discovery of Conrad. I went to Brooklyn to hear ‘Tosca’ sung at the Academy of Music. I had bought my ticket, and I had about an hour to spend before it would be time for the curtain to rise. So I went across the street to the Brooklyn Public Library.

“While I was idly looking over the novels on the shelves I came upon Conrad’s *Typhoon*. I sat down and began to read it.

“When I arose, I had finished the book. Also, I had missed the first two acts of the opera—and I had been eager to hear them. But Conrad

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more than compensated for the loss of those two acts.

“Many of the modern English writers are romanticists. Galsworthy surely is no realist. And William de Morgan, although he writes at great length and has abundance of detail, is a romanticist. He does not use detail for its own sake, as the realists use it; he uses it only when it has some definite value in unfolding the plot or revealing character. He uses it significantly; he is particularly successful in using it humorously, as Daudet and Dickens used it. Arnold Bennett is a realist, and I think that one of the reasons why he is so widely read in the United States is because the life which he describes so minutely is a life much like that of his American readers. People like to read about the sort of life they already know. The average reader wants to have a sense of familiarity with the characters in his novels.”

Mr. Glass is a contrary person. It is contrary for the only novelist who knows anything about New York's cloak-and-suit trade to be of English birth and to look like a poet. It is contrary of him to have that distinctively American play, “Potash and Perlmutter,” start its London run

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two years ago and be "still going strong." And it was contrary of him not to say, as he might reasonably be expected to say in view of his own success, that the encounters and adventures of business must be the theme of the American novelists of the future.

"No," he said, in answer to my question, "I do not see any reason for the novelist to confine himself to business life. Themes for fiction are universal. A novelist should write of the life he knows best, whatever it may be.

"I do not mean that the novelist should write about his own business. I mean that he should write about the psychology that he understands. A man who spends years in the cloak-and-suit business is not, therefore, qualified to write novels about that business, even if he is qualified to write novels at all.

"I had no real knowledge of the cloak-and-suit trade when I began to write about it. I made many technical blunders. For instance, I had Potash and Perlmutter buying goods by the gross instead of by the piece. And I received many indignant letters pointing out my mistake.

"I had never been in the cloak-and-suit trade. But my work as a lawyer had brought me into

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contact with many people who were in that business, and I had intimate knowledge of the psychology of the Jew, his religion, his humor, his tragedy, his whole attitude toward life.

"The trouble with many young writers," said Mr. Glass, "is that they don't know what they are writing about. They are attempting to describe psychological states of which they have only third-hand knowledge. Their ideas have no semblance of truth, and therefore their work is absolutely unconvincing."

"At any rate," I said, "you will admit that American writers are more and more inclined to make the United States the scene of their stories. Do you think that O. Henry's influence is responsible for this?"

"No," said Mr. Glass, "I do not think that this is due to O. Henry's influence. It was a natural development. You see, O. Henry's literary life lasted for only about four years, and while he has had many imitators, I do not think that he can be given credit for directing the attention of American writers to the life of their own country.

"Probably William Dean Howells should be called the founder of the modern school of Ameri-

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can fiction. He was the first writer to achieve distinguished success for tales of modern American life. There were several other authors who began to write about Americans soon after Mr. Howells began—Thomas Janvier, H. C. Bunner, and Brander Matthews were among them.

“Kipling’s popularity gave a great impetus to the writing of short stories of modern life. It is interesting to trace the course of the short story from Kipling to O. Henry.

“Did you ever notice,” asked Mr. Glass, “that the best stories on New York life are written by people who have been born and brought up outside of the city? The writer who has always lived in New York seems thereby to be disqualified from writing about it, just as the man in the cloak-and-suit trade is too close to his subject to reproduce it in fiction. The writer who comes to New York after spending his youth elsewhere gets the full romantic effect of New York; he gets a perspective on it which the native New-Yorker seldom attains. The viewpoint of the writer who has always lived in New York is subjective, whereas one must have the objective viewpoint to write about the city successfully.

“I have been surprised by the caricatures of

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American life which come from the pen of writers American by birth and ancestry. Recently I read a novel by an American who has—and deserves, for he is a writer of talent and reputation—a large following. This was a story of life in a manufacturing town with which the novelist is thoroughly familiar. It, however, appears to have been written to satisfy a grudge and consequently one could mistake it for the work of an Englishman who had once made a brief tour of America. For the big manufacturer who was the principal character in the story was vulgar enough to satisfy the prejudice of any reader of the *London Daily Mail*. Certainly the descriptions of the gaudy and offensive furniture in the rich manufacturer's house and the dialogue of the members of his family and the servants could provide splendid ammunition for the *Saturday Review* or *The Academy*. The book appears to be a caricature, and yet that novelist had lived most of his life among the sort of people about whom he was writing!

“And how absolutely ignorant most New-Yorkers are of New York. Irvin Cobb comes here from Louisville, Kentucky, and gets an intimate knowledge of the city, and puts that knowl-

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edge into his short stories. But a man brought up here makes the most ridiculous mistakes when he writes about New York.

"I read a story of New York life recently that absolutely disgusted me, its author was so ignorant of his subject. Yet he was a born New-Yorker. Let me tell you what he wrote. He said that a man went into an arm-chair lunch-room and bought a meal. His check amounted to sixty-five cents! Now any one who knows anything about arm-chair lunch-rooms beyond the mere fact of their existence knows that the cashier of such an institution would drop dead if a customer paid him sixty-five cents at one time. Then, the hero of this story had as a part of his meal in this arm-chair lunch-room a baked potato, for which he paid fifteen cents! Imagine a baked potato in such a place, and a fifteen-cent baked potato at that!"

Mr. Glass did not, like most successful humorists, begin as a writer of tragedy. His first story to be printed was "Aloysius of the Docks," a humorous story of an East Side Irish boy, which appeared in 1900. The lower East Side was for many years the scene of most of his stories. But he does resemble most other writers in this re-

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spect, that he wrote verse before he wrote fiction. I asked him to show me some of his poetry, and he demurred somewhat violently. But, after all, a poet is a poet, and at last I succeeded in persuading him to produce this exhibit. Here it is—a poem by the author of “Potash and Perlmutter”:

FERRYBOATS

There sounds aloft a warning scream,
The jingling bell gives tongue below,
She breasts again the busy stream,
And cleaves its murky tide to snow.
Bereft of burnished glittering brass,
Ungainly bulging fore and aft,
Slowly from shore to shore they pass—
The matrons of the river craft.

Mr. Glass believes that humorous writing in America has changed more than any other sort. But he does not, as I thought he would, attribute this change to the increased cosmopolitanism of the country, to the influx of people from other lands.

“Certainly our ideas of what is funny have changed,” he said. “Humor is an ephemeral thing. A generation ago we laughed at what to-day would merely make us ill. The subjects and the methods of the humorists are different.

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Who nowadays can find a laugh in the pages of Artemus Ward, Philander Q. Doesticks, or Petroleum V. Nasby? Yet in their time these men set the whole countinent in a roar.

“Contrast two humorists typical of their respective periods—Bill Nye and Abe Martin. I remember many years ago reading a story by Bill Nye which every one then considered tremendously funny. He told how he went downtown and got a shave and put on a clean collar and as he said, ‘otherwise disguised himself.’ When he got home his little dog refused to recognize him, and several pages were devoted to his efforts to persuade the dog of his identity. Then, failing to convince the dog that he was really the same Bill Nye in spite of his shave and clean collar, he impaled it on a pitchfork and buried it, putting over it the epitaph, ‘Not dead, but jerked hence by request.’

“Now contrast with that a good example of modern American humor—a joke by Abe Martin which I recently saw. There was a picture of two or three men looking at a tattered tramp, and one of them was represented as saying: ‘You wouldn’t think to look at him that that man played an elegant game of billiards ten years ago!’

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“It is an entirely different form of humor, you see. Bill Nye and the writers of his school got their effects by grotesque misspelling, fantastic ideas, and by the liberal use of shock and surprise. The modern humor is subtler, more delicate, and more likely to endure.

“I do not think that the fact that America has become more cosmopolitan has anything to do with this altered sense of humor. The American humorists do not select cosmopolitan themes; the best of them are distinctively American in their subject. Irvin Cobb, George Fitch, Kate Douglas Wiggin, Edna Ferber Stewart, who wrote *The Fugitive Blacksmith*—all these people draw their inspiration from purely American phases of the life around them.”

“What is it, then,” I asked, “that has changed American humor?”

“Leisure,” answered Mr. Glass. “Philander Q. Doesticks and other humorists of his time wrote to amuse pioneers, people rough and elemental in their tastes. Their audience consisted of men who worked hard most of the time, and therefore had to be hit hard by any joke that was to entertain them at all. But as Americans grew more leisurely, and therefore had time to read,

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see plays, and look at pictures, they lost their taste for crude and violent horseplay, and the new sort of humor came in. Undoubtedly the same thing occurs in every newly settled country—Australia, for example. It is unlikely that the Australian of one hundred years from now will be amused by the things that amuse Australians to-day.

“But the humor that entertains the citizens of a country of which the civilization is well established is likely to retain its charm through the years. Mark Twain’s stories do not lose their flavor. But Mark Twain was not exclusively a humorist; he was a student of life and he reflected the tragedy of existence as well as its comedy. So does Irvin Cobb, who is the nearest approach to Mark Twain now living.

“One source of Mark Twain’s strength is his occasional vulgarity. That surely is something that we should have in greater abundance in American humor. I do not mean that our humorists should be pornographic and obscene; I mean merely that they should be allowed great freedom in their choice of themes. There is no humor without vulgarity. Our humorists have been so limited and restrained that we have no

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paper fit to be compared with *Simplicissimus* or *Le Rire*.

“You see, a vulgar thing is not offensive if it is funny. Fun for fun’s sake is a much more important maxim than art for art’s sake. The humorists have a greater need for freedom in choice of themes than the serious writers, especially the realistic writers, who are always demanding greater freedom.”

Mr. Glass returned to the subject of the failure of cosmopolitanism to influence American literature by calling attention to the fact that very few American writers find their themes among their foreign-born fellow-citizens. “Where,” he asked, “are the German-Americans and the Italian-Americans? No writer knows these foreign-born citizens well enough to write about them. The best American stories are about native Americans. I admit that my stories are not about people peculiar to New York—you can find counterparts of ‘Potash and Perlmutter’ in Berlin, Paris, and London. But mine are not among the best stories of American character. The best story of American character is ‘Daisy Miller.’”

Mr. Glass believes that the technique of the short story has improved greatly during the last

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score of years, but he is not so favorable in his view of the modern novel, especially of the "cross-section of life" type of work. He believes that the war will produce a great revival of literary excellence in Europe, just as the Franco-Prussian War did; and he called attention to something which has apparently been neglected by most people who have discussed the subject—the tremendous inspiration which Guy de Maupassant found in the Franco-Prussian War. But he said, in conclusion:

"But any man who sits down to judge American literature in the course of a few minutes' talk is an ass for his pains. Literary snap judgments are foolish things. Nothing that I have said to you has any value at all."

THE "MOVIES" BENEFIT LITERATURE

REX BEACH

THE "MOVIES" BENEFIT LITERATURE

REX BEACH

EVEN the most prejudiced opponent of the moving pictures will admit that they are becoming more intellectually respectable. Crude farce and melodrama are being replaced by versions of classic plays and novels; literature is elevating the motion picture. And Mr. Rex Beach believes that the motion picture is benefiting literature.

This author of widely read novels had been talking to me about the departments of literature—the novel, the short story, and the rest—and among them he named the moving picture. I asked him if he believed that moving pictures were dangerous for novelists, leading them to fill their books with action, with a view to the profits of cinematographic reproduction. He said:

“Well, authors are human beings, of course. They like to make money and to have their work

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reach as large an audience as possible. I suppose that the great majority of them keep their eyes on the screen, because they know how profitable the moving picture is and because they want their work seen by more people than would read their novels."

"Do you think that this harms their work?" I asked.

"It might if the novelists overdid it," he answered. "It would harm their work if they became nothing but scenario writers. But so far the result has been good.

"The tendency of the moving picture has been to make authors visualize more clearly than ever before their characters and scenes that they are writing about. Their work has become more realistic. I do not mean realistic in the sense in which this word is used of some French writers; I do not mean erotic or morbid. I mean actual, convincing, clearly visualized.

"Literature has elevated the moving picture, keeping it out, to a great extent, of melodrama and slap-stick comedy. And in return, the moving picture has done a service to fiction, making the authors give more attention to exact visualization."

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“Has American fiction been lacking in visualization?” I asked.

“No,” said Mr. Beach. “American novelists visualize more clearly to-day than they did four or five years ago, before the moving picture had become so important, but they always were strong in visualization. This sort of realism is America’s chief contribution to fiction.”

“Then you believe that there is a distinctively American literature?” I asked. “You do not agree with the critic who said that American literature was ‘a condition of English literature’?”

“I do not agree with him,” Mr. Beach replied. “American writers use the English language, so I suppose that what they write belongs to English literature. But there is a distinctively American literature; Americans talk in their own manner, think in their own manner, and handle business propositions in their own manner, and naturally they write in their own manner. American literature is different from other kinds of literature just as American business methods are different from those of Europe.

“Fiction written in America must necessarily be tinged with American thought and American action. I have no patience with people who say

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that America has no literature. They say that nothing we are writing to-day will live. Well, what if that is true? It's true not only of literature, but of everything else.

"Our roads won't last forever; they're built in a hurry to be used in a hurry. But they're better roads to drive and motor over than those old Roman roads of Europe. Our office-buildings won't last as long as the Pyramids, but they're better for business purposes.

"Personally, I've never been enthusiastic over things that have no virtues but age and ugliness. I'd rather have a good, strong, serviceable piece of Grand Rapids furniture than any ramshackle, moth-eaten antique."

"But don't you think," I asked, "that the permanence of a book's appeal is a proof of its greatness?"

"I don't see how we can tell anything definite about the permanence of the appeal of books written in our time. And I don't mean by literature writings that necessarily endure through the ages. I believe that literature is the expression of the mind, the sentiment, the intellectual attitude of the people who live at the time it is written. I admit that our literature is ephemeral—

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like everything else about us—but I believe that it is good.”

Mr. Rex Beach was not pacing his floor nervously; he was crossing the room with the practical intention of procuring a cigarette. Nevertheless, his firm tread lent emphasis to his remarks.

“There is a sort of literary snobbery,” he said, “noticeable among people who condemn contemporaneous literature just because it is contemporaneous. The strongest proof that there is something good in the literature of the day is that it reaches a great audience. There must be something in it or people wouldn’t read it.

“The people are the final judges; it is to them that authors must appeal. Take any big question of public importance—after it has been discussed by politicians and newspapers, it is the people who at last decide it.

“A man may have devoted his life to some tremendous achievement, and have left it as a monument to his fame. But it is to public opinion that we must look for the verdict on the value of his life’s work.

“Take Carnegie, for example; when he dies, you bet people will have his number! His ideas are a tremendous menace, and the people who

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believe as he does about peace will find themselves generally execrated one of these days.

“It may seem to you that this has nothing to do with literature. But it has a good deal to do with it. I know that many things have been said about the effect on literature of the war. But I want to say that the war will have, I hope, one admirable effect on American writers—it will make them stir up the American conscience to a sense of the necessity for national defensive preparation. The writers must educate the people in world politics and show them the necessity for defensive action. Americans have a sort of mental inertia in regard to public questions, and the writers must overcome this inertia.

“The writers must stir up the politicians and the people. There’s been a whole lot of mush written about peace. There always will be war. We can’t reform the world.

“The pacifists say that it is useless to arm because war cannot be prevented by armaments. The obvious answer to that is that neither can the failure to arm prevent war. And the verdict after the war will be better if we are prepared for it. The writers must call our attention to the folly of leaving ourselves open to attack.

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“It’s hard to reach the conscience of the American people on any big issue. We are too independent, too indifferent, too ready to slump back. That’s one of the penalties of democracy, I suppose; the national sense of patriotism becomes atrophied. It needs some whaling-big jolt to wake it up. Every American writer can help to do this.

“The trouble is that we have too many men with feminine minds, too many of these delicate fellows with handkerchiefs up their sleeves. I can’t imagine any women with ideas more feminine than those of Bryan—could any woman evolve anything more feminine than his peace-at-any-price idea?”

Mr. Beach smiled. “I suppose I should not be talking about world politics,” he said. “There are so many men who have specialized in that subject and are therefore competent to talk about it. I am only a specialist in writing.”

“Do you think,” I asked, “that writers should be specialists in writing? Some people believe that the best fiction, for example, is produced by men who do some other work for a living.”

“I certainly believe that a writer should devote himself to writing,” said Mr. Beach. “This is

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an age of specialization, and literature is no exception to the general rule. Literature is like everything else—you must specialize in it to be successful.”

“This has not always been the case, has it?” I asked. “Has literature been produced by people who made writing only an avocation?”

“Surely,” said Mr. Beach. “It is only within the last few years that writers have been able to write for a living and make enough to keep the fringe off their cuffs.”

I asked what had caused this change.

“It has been caused chiefly by the magazines. The modern magazines have done two important things for fiction—they have brought it within every one’s reach, and they have increased the prices paid to the authors, thus enabling them to make a living by devoting themselves exclusively to writing.”

“But it has been said,” I ventured, “that a writer, no matter how talented he may be, cannot make a comfortable living out of writing fiction unless he is most extraordinarily gifted with ideas, and that, therefore, a writer takes a tremendous risk if he throws himself upon literature for support.”

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“How is a writer going to get ideas for stories,” asked Mr. Beach, in turn, “unless he uses ideas? The more ideas a man uses, the more ideas will come to him.

“The imaginative quality in a man is like any other quality; the more it is functioned the better it is functioned. If you fail to use any organ of your body, nature will in time let that organ go out of commission.

“It is just the same with imagination as with any organ of the body. If a writer waits for ideas to come to him and ceases to exercise his imagination, his imagination will become atrophied. But if he uses his imagination it will grow stronger and ideas will come to him with increasing frequency.”

Mr. Beach is an enthusiastic advocate of the moving picture. In the course of his discussion of it he advanced an interesting theory as to the next stage of its development.

“The next use of the moving picture,” he said, “will be the editorial use. We have had the moving picture used as a comic device, as a device to spread news, and as an interpreter of fiction. But as yet no one has endeavored to use it as a means to mold public opinion in great vital issues of the day.

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“Of course, it has been used educationally, and as part of various propaganda schemes. But it will be used in connection with great political problems. It will become the most powerful of all influences for directing public opinion in politics and in everything else.

“It will play a mighty part in the thought of the country and of the world.

“I have seen men and women coming from a great moving-picture show almost hysterical with emotion. I have heard them shout and stamp and whistle at what they saw flashed before them on a white sheet as they never did in any theater.

“What a strong argument ‘The Birth of a Nation’ presents! Now, suppose that same art and that same equipment were used to present arguments about some political issue of our own time, instead of one of our fathers’ time. What a force that would be!”

WHAT IS GENIUS?

ROBERT W. CHAMBERS

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WHAT IS GENIUS?

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SENTIMENTAL TOMMY'S great predecessor in the relentless pursuit of the "right word" was, teachers of literature tell us, the un-sentimental Gustave Flaubert. But these academic gentlemen, who insist that the writer shall spend hours, even days, if necessary, in perfecting a single sentence, seldom produce any literature. I asked Robert W. Chambers, who has written more "best sellers" than any other living writer, what he thought of Flaubert's method of work.

He looked at me rather quizzically. "I think," he said, with a smile, "that Flaubert was slow. What else is there to think? Of course he was a matchless workman. But if he spent half a day in hunting for one word, he was slow, that's all. He might have gone on writing and then have come back later for that inevitable word."

"But what do you think of Flaubert's method,

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as a method?" I asked. "Do you think that a writer who works with such laborious care is right?"

"It's not a question of right or wrong," said Mr. Chambers, "it's a question of the individual writer's ability and tendency. If a man can produce novels like those of Flaubert, by writing slowly and laboriously, by all means let him write that way. But it would not be fair to establish that as the only legitimate method of writing.

"Some authors always write slowly. With some of them it's like pulling teeth for them to get their ideas out on paper. It's the same way in painting. You may see half a dozen men drawing from the same model. One will make his sketch premier coup; another will devote an hour to his; another will work all day. They may be artists of equal ability. It is the result that counts, not the method or the time."

"And what is it that makes a man an artist, in pigments or in words?" I asked. "Do you believe in the old saying that the poet—the creative artist—is born and not made?"

"No," said Mr. Chambers, "I do not think that that is the truth. I think that with regard to the writer it is true to this extent, that there must

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exist, in the first place, the inclination to write, to express ideas in written words. Then the writer must have something to express really worthy of expression, and he must learn how to express it. These three things make the writer—the inclination to say something, the possession of something worth saying, and the knowledge of how to say it.”

“And where does genius come in?” I asked.

“What is genius?” asked Mr. Chambers, in turn. “I don’t know. Perhaps genius is the combination of these three qualities in the highest degree.

“Of course,” he added, with a laugh, “I know that all this is contrary to the opinion of the public. People like to believe that writers depend entirely upon an inspiration. They like to think that we are a hazy lot, sitting around and posing and waiting for some sort of divine afflatus. They think that writers sit around like a Quaker meeting, waiting for the spirit to move them.”

“But have there not been writers,” I asked, “who seem to prove that there is some truth in the inspiration theory? There is William de Morgan, for example, beginning to write novels in his old age. He spent most of his life in working in ceramics, not with words.”

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“On the contrary,” said Mr. Chambers, “I think that William de Morgan proves my theory. He really spent all his life in learning to write—he was in training for being a novelist all the while. The novelist’s training may be unconscious. He must have—as William de Morgan surely always has had—keen interest in the world. That is the main thing for the writer to have—a vivid interest in life. If we are to devote ourselves to the production of pictures of humanity according to our own temperaments, we must have this vivid interest in life; we must have intense curiosity. The men who have counted in literature have had this intense, never-satiated curiosity about life.

“This is true for the romanticists as well as the realists. The most imaginative and fantastic romances must have their basis in real life

“I know of no better examples of this truth than the gargoyles which one sees in Gothic architecture in Europe. These extraordinary creatures that thrust their heads from the sides of cathedrals, misshapen and grotesque, are nevertheless thoroughly logical. That is, no matter how fantastic they may be, they have backbones and ribs and tails, and these backbones and ribs and tails

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are logical—that is, they could do what backbones and ribs and tails are supposed to do.

“In real life there are no creatures like the gargoyles, but the important thing is that the gargoyles really could exist. This is a good example of the true method of construction. The base of the construction must rest on real knowledge. The medieval sculptors knew the formation of existing animals; therefore they knew how to make gargoyles.”

“How does this theory apply to poets?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” answered Mr. Chambers, “but it seems to me to apply to all creative work. The artist must know life before he can build even a travesty on life.”

I called Mr. Chambers’s attention to the work of certain ultra-modern poets who deliberately exclude life from their work. He was not inclined to take them seriously.

“There always have been aberrations,” he said, “and there always will be. They’re bound to exist. And there is bound to be, from time to time, attitudinizing and straining after effect on the part of prose writers as well as poets. And it is all based on one thing—self-consciousness.

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It is self-consciousness that spoils the work of some modern writers."

I asked Mr. Chambers to be more specific in his allusions. "I cannot mention names," he said, "but there are certain writers who are always conscious of the style in which they are writing. Sometimes they consciously write in the style of some other men. They are thinking all the while of their technique and equipment, and the result is that their work loses its effect. A writer should not be convinced all the while that he is a realist or a romanticist; he should not subject himself deliberately to some special school of writing, and certainly he should not be conscious of his own style. The less a writer thinks of his technique the sooner he arrives at self-expression.

"It's just like ordinary conversation. A man is known by the way in which he talks—that is his 'style.' But he is not all the while acutely conscious of his manner of talking—unless he has an impediment in his speech. So the writer should be known by his untrammelled and unembarrassed expression."

I asked Mr. Chambers what he thought of the idea that the popularity of magazines has vitiated the public taste and lowered the standard of fiction.

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“I do not think that this is the case,” he said. “I do not see that the custom of serial publication has harmed the novel. It is not a modern innovation, you know. The novels of Dickens, Thackeray, and George Eliot had serial publication. But I do believe that the American public reads less fiction than it did a generation ago, and that its taste is not so good as it was.”

This was a surprising statement to come from an author whom the public has received with such enthusiasm, so I asked Mr. Chambers to explain.

“In the days of our forefathers,” he said, “this was an Anglo-Saxon country. Then the average intelligence of the nation was higher and the taste in literature better. But there came the great rush of immigration to the United States from Europe, and the Anglo-Saxon culture of the country was diluted.

“You see signs of this lowered standard of taste in fiction and on the stage. The demand is for primitive and childish stuff, and the reason for this is that the audience has only a sort of back-stairs intelligence. If we had progressed along the lines in which we were headed before this wave of immigration, we would not be satisfied with the books and magazines that are given us to-day.

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“Of course the magazines are mechanically better to-day than they were a generation ago. Then we had not the photogravure and the half-tone and the other processes that make our magazines beautiful. But we had better taste and also we had more leisure.

“I remember when one of the most widely read of our magazines was a popular science monthly, which printed articles by great scientists on biological and other topics. That was in the days when Darwin was announcing his theory of evolution—the first great jolt which orthodoxy received. People would not take time to read a magazine of that sort now. They are so occupied with business and dancing and all sorts of occupations that they have little leisure for reading.”

Mr. Chambers stopped talking suddenly and laughed. “I’m not a good man for you to bring these questions to,” he said, “because I never have had any special reverence for books or literature as such. I reverence the books that I like, not all books.”

“And have you such a thing as a favorite author?” I asked.

“Yes,” said Mr. Chambers. “Dumas.”

During the 1870’s Mr. Chambers was an art

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student in Paris, and he has many interesting memories of the French and English writers and painters who have made that period memorable. He knew Paul Verlaine (whose poetry he greatly admires), Charles Conder, and Aubrey Beardsley.

“One day,” he said, “I was out on a shooting-trip—I think it was in Belgium—and I met a young English poet, a charming fellow, whose work I was later to know and like. It was the poet who wrote at least one great poem—‘Cynara’—it was Ernest Dowson.

“I knew many of the Beaux Arts crowd, because my brother was a student of architecture at the Beaux Arts. And they were a decent, clean crowd—they were not ‘decadents.’ I do not take much stock in the pose of ‘decadence,’ nor in the artistic temperament. I never saw a real artist with the artistic temperament. I always associated that with weakness.”

Mr. Chambers, although he has intimate knowledge of the Quartier Latin, has little use for “Bohemia.”

“What is Bohemia?” he asked. “If it is a place where a number of artists huddle together for the sake of animal warmth, I have nothing to say against it. But if it is a place where a number

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of artists come to scorn the world, then it is a dangerous thing. The artist should not separate himself from the world.

“These artistic and literary cults are wrong. I do not believe in professional clubs and cliques. If writers form a combination for business reasons, that is all right, but a writer should not associate exclusively with other writers; he should do his work and then go out and see and talk to people in other professions. We should sweep the cobwebs from the profession of writing and not try to fence it in from the public.”

To the somewhat trite question as to the effects of the war on literature, Mr. Chambers made first his usual modest answer, “I don’t know.” But when I told him of the author who had dogmatically stated that war always stops literature, and that the Civil War had produced no writing worthy of preservation, Mr. Chambers reconsidered.

“Did he say that the Civil War had produced no literature worthy of preservation?” he said. “He must have forgotten that the Civil War caused one man to make contributions to our literature as valuable as anything we possess. He must have forgotten Abraham Lincoln.”

Before I left, I mentioned to Mr. Chambers the

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theory that literature is better as a staff than as a crutch, as an avocation than as a vocation. This, like the "inevitable word" theory, is greatly beloved by college professors. Mr. Chambers said:

"I disagree utterly with that theory. Do you remember how Dr. Johnson wrote *Rasselas*? It was in order to raise the money to pay for his mother's funeral. I believe that the best work is done under pressure. Of course the work must be enjoyed; a man in choosing a profession should select that sort of work which he prefers to do in his leisure moments. Let him do for his life-work the task which he would select for his leisure—and let him not take himself too seriously!"

DETERIORATION OF THE SHORT STORY

JAMES LANE ALLEN

DETERIORATION OF THE SHORT STORY

JAMES LANE ALLEN

THAT Edgar Allan Poe, in spite of his acknowledged genius, has had practically no influence on the development of the short story in America, and that the current short story written in America is inferior to that written during the years between 1870 and 1895, these are two remarkable statements made to me by James Lane Allen, the distinguished author of *The Choir Invisible*, *The Mettle of the Pasture*, and many another memorable novel.

I found Mr. Allen in the pleasant workroom of his New York residence. Himself a Southerner, he is an enthusiastic admirer of the poet whose name is inseparably linked with Southern letters. But I was soon to find that he does not share the opinion of those who consider Poe the originator of the modern short story, nor does he rate Poe's influence in fiction as very wide.

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“There is always much interest in short stories,” he said, “among authors, and in the great body of readers. You say that Mr. Gouverneur Morris believes that except Poe almost no writer before our generation could write short stories.

“I do not wish to be placed in a position of publicly criticizing Mr. Gouverneur Morris’s opinion of the short story. But it may not seem antagonistic to the opinion of any one to call attention to the fact that, of all American short stories yet written, the two most widely known in and outside our country were written independently of Poe. These are *The Man Without a Country* and *Rip Van Winkle*.

“As the technique of the American short story is understood and applied to-day, neither of these two stories can be regarded as a work of impeccable art. But flaws have not kept them from fame. By a common verdict the flawless short stories of the day are fameless. Certainly, also, Hawthorne was uninfluenced by Poe in writing short stories that remain secure among brief American classics.

“This, of course, is limiting the outlook to our own literature. Beyond our literature, what of Balzac? In the splendor of his achievements with the novel, Balzac has perhaps been slighted as a

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master of the short story. Think, for instance, of such a colossal fragment as *The Atheist's Mass*.

“And what of Boccaccio? For centuries before Poe, the *Decameron* shone before the eyes of the world as the golden treasury of model forms for the short story.

“And centuries before Boccaccio, flashing from hand to hand all over the world, there was a greater treasury still, the treasury of *The Arabian Nights*.

“It is no disparagement to Poe to say that his genius did not originate the genius of the short story. His true place, his logical place, in the development of the short story is that of a man with ancestors—naturally!

“Since there is a breath of nativity blowing through his stories, I think it is the breath of far distant romance from somewhere. Certainly his stories are as remote from our civilization and from all things American as are Oriental tales.”

Mr. Allen showed he had given much thought to Edgar Allan Poe's place among the American fiction writers, so I thought that he might also have some interesting things to say about Poe as a poet. He had. He mentioned a quality of Poe's verse which for some reason or other seems

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heretofore to have escaped the notice of students of American poetry.

"It may be worth while calling attention," he said, "to the fact that nearly all of Poe's poems belong to the night. Twelve o'clock noon never strikes to his poetic genius. His best poems are Poe's Nights, if not *Arabian Nights*.

"There is a saying that the German novel long ago died of the full moon. To Poe the dead moon was the orb of life. The sun blotted him out."

Great as is his admiration for Poe's genius, Mr. Allen does not believe he has greatly influenced American prose. He said:

"As to the influence of Poe's short stories in our country, this seems to be a tradition mainly fostered by professors of English in American universities and by the historians of our literature. The tradition does not prevail among American writers. Actually there is no traceable stamp of the influence of his prose writings on the work of any American short-story writer known to me, save one. That one is Ambrose Bierce."

"Why is it," I asked, "that Poe's influence on American fiction has been so slight?"

"The main reason," Mr. Allen answered, "why

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Poe's stories have remained outside American imitation or emulation is perhaps because they are projected outside American sympathies. They lie to-day where they lay when they were written—beyond the confines of what the German calls the literature of the soil.

“Poe and Ambrose Bierce are at least to be linked in this: that they are the two greatest and the two coldest of all American short-story writers. Any living American fictionist will perhaps bear testimony to the fact that he has never met any other writer who has been influenced by the stories of Poe.”

“Mr. Allen,” I said, “you believe that the American short story has not been influenced by Poe; has the American short story, however, improved since his time?”

“The renascence of the American short story,” said Mr. Allen, thoughtfully, “its real efflorescence as a natural literary art form, took place after the close of the Civil War. The historians of our literature have, perhaps, as is customary with them, held to the strict continuity of tradition as explaining this renascence. If so, they have omitted one of the instinctive forces of human nature, which invariably act in nations that have

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literatures and act ungovernably at the termination of all wars.

“After any war spontaneity in story-telling is one of the ungovernable impulses of human nature. This can be traced from modern literature back to primitive man returning from his feuds. When he had no literature, he carved his story on the walls of his cave or on a bone to tell the glory of the fight. Before he could even carve a bone he hung up a row of the heads of the defeated. Perhaps the original form of the war short story was a good, thick volume of heads. Within our own civilization the American Indian told his short stories in this way—with American heads or tufts of scalps—a sad way of telling them for our forefathers.

“At the close of the American Civil War the atmosphere, both North and South, was charged with stories. The amazing fact is not that short stories should have begun at that time, but that they should have begun with such perfection. This perfection expressed itself more richly during the period, say, from 1870 to 1895—twenty-five years—than it has ever done since.

“The evidence is at hand that the best of the American short stories written during that period

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outweigh in value those that have been written later—with the exception of those of one man. And this evidence takes this form—that these stories were collected into volumes, had an enormous sale, had the highest critical appreciation, have passed into the histories of literature written since, have gone into the courses of English literature now being taught in the universities, and are still steadily being sold.

“Is this true of the best short stories being written now? Are any of the short stories written since that period being bound into volumes and extensively sold? Do the professors of English literature recommend them to their classes? That is the practical test.

“The one exception is O. Henry. He alone stands out in the later period as a world within himself; as much apart from any one else as are Hawthorne and Poe.”

Mr. Allen did not express an opinion as to the probable effects on literature of the war. He said:

“Now, the North and the South in the renaissance of the short story after the Civil War divide honors about equally. But it is impossible to speak of the Southern short story, or indeed of Southern literature at all, without being brought

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to the brink of a subject which lies back of the whole philosophy of Southern literature.”

Mr. Allen paused for a moment. Then he continued, speaking with an intensity which reminded me of his Southern birth and upbringing:

“Suppose that at the end of the present European war Germany should be victorious and France defeated. And suppose that in France there should not be left a single publishing-house, a single literary periodical, a single literary editor, a single critic, and scarcely even a single buyer of books.

“And suppose that the defeated French people wanted to cry out their soul over their defeat and against their conquerors. And suppose that in order to do this every French novelist, short-story writer, or poet, unable to keep silent, should begin to write and begin to send his novel or his short story or his poem over into Germany to be read by a German editor, published by a German publisher, and sold in a German bookshop to a German reader. What kind of French literature of the war do you think would appear in Germany and be fostered there?

“But this is exactly what happened after the war between the North and the South.

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“The few voices that began to be sent northward across the demolished battle-line could only be the voices that would be listened to and welcomed on the other side. That is the reason why that first literature was so mild, so tempered, so thin, so devitalized, that it seemed not to come from an enraged people, but from the memories of their ghosts.

“As a result of finding war literature inexpressible in such conditions, the young generation of Southerners dropped the theme of war altogether and explored other paths. So that perhaps the most original and spontaneous fragments of this new Southern post-bellum literature are in the regions of the imagination, where no note of war is heard.

“It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that if Joel Chandler Harris, a young Southerner, had possessed full freedom to wreak his genius on the war, the world might never have heard of ‘Uncle Remus.’ The world might never have known that among the cotton-plantations there dwelt a brother to Æsop and to La Fontaine.”

SOME HARMFUL INFLUENCES

HARRY LEON WILSON

SOME HARMFUL INFLUENCES

HARRY LEON WILSON

FROM the Pacific Coast—from what is enthusiastically termed “the Golden West”—from that section of the United States which is large and chivalrous and gladly suffers suffrage—comes a voice, replying to my question: “What is the matter with contemporary fiction?”

And the voice says, “*Cherchez la femme!*”

It is the voice of Mr. Harry Leon Wilson, author of *Bunker Bean*, *Ruggles of Red Gap*, and many another popular novel, and co-author with Mr. Booth Tarkington of several successful plays. Mr. Wilson believes that the dullness and insincerity of our novels are due to the taste of most of their readers—that is, to the taste of the women.

I asked Mr. Wilson what, in his opinion, was the influence most harmful to the development of literature in America.

“I know little about literature,” Mr. Wilson

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replied, "but if you mean the novel, I should say the intense satisfaction with it as it is, of the maker, the seller, and the buyer. And to trace this baneful satisfaction to its source, I should say it lies in the lack of a cultivated taste in our women readers of fiction.

"Publishers are agreed, I believe, that women buy the great bulk of their output. The current novel is as deliberately planned to please the woman buyer as is any other bit of trade goods. The publisher knows what she wants to read, the writer finds out from the publisher, and you can see the result in the advertisements—and the writer's royalty statements.

"'We want,' says the publisher, 'a stunning girl for the cover and a corking good love interest to catch the women.' (Publishers do talk that way when they have safely locked themselves in their low dens.)

"This love interest is always said to be wholesome and sweet. I don't know. Certainly it is sweet enough. In the trade novel it's as if you took a segment of rich layer cake, the chocolate-and-jelly kind, poured over it a half-pint of nice thick molasses, and then, just to make sure, sprinkled this abundantly with fine sugar.

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“Anyway, that’s what the publisher has found—and he has the best means of knowing—that the American woman will buy year in and year out. And you can’t blame him for printing it. A publisher with ideals of his own couldn’t last any longer than a grocer with ideals of his own, or a clergyman.

“And least of all can you blame the author for writing this slush, because nine times out of ten he doesn’t know any better. How should he, with no one to tell him?

“And that,” said Mr. Wilson, “is another evil almost as great in its influence as the undeveloped taste of our women readers. I mean our lack of authoritative criticism. Now we really do get a good novel once in a blue moon, but one who has been made wary by the mass of trade novels would never suspect it from reading our book reviews. The good novel, it is true, is praised heartily, but then so are all the bad novels—and how is one to tell?

“At least eighty-five per cent. of our book reviews are mere amiable, perfunctory echoes of the enthusiastic ‘canned’ review which the publisher obligingly prints on the paper jacket of his best seller. I sometimes suspect this task is allotted

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to a member of the staff who is known to be 'fond of reading.'

"Another evil influence is often alleged—the pressure the business office puts on the reviewer to be tender with novels that are lavishly advertised, but I have never thought there was more than a grain of truth in this.

"Perhaps a publisher wouldn't continue to patronize a sheet that habitually blurted out the truth about his best sellers, but I really doubt that this was ever put to an issue. I don't believe the average book-reviewer knows any better than the average novelist the difference between a good and a bad novel.

"It isn't so with the other arts. We have critics for those. Music, sculpture, painting—we know the best and get the best.

"But, then, the novel is scarcely considered to be an art form. Any one can—and does—write a novel, if he can only find the time. It isn't supposed to be a thing one must study, like plumbing or architecture.

"The novelist who wants to write a best seller this year studies the best seller of last year, and wisely, because that is what the publisher wants—something like his last one that sold big. He

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is looking for it night and day and for nothing else. He wants good carpenters who have followed the design that women have liked. Fiction is the one art you don't take seriously, and there is no one to tell us we should; there are no critics to inform the writers and the readers and make the publishers timid.

"True, we have in this country two or three, possibly four, critics who can speak with authority, men who know what the novel has been, what it is with us, what it ought to be. One of them is a friend of mine, and I reproached him lately for not speaking out in meeting oftener.

"His defense was pathetic. First, that ninety out of a hundred of our novels are beneath criticism. Second, as to the remaining ten that would merit the rapier instead of the bludgeon—'criticism is harder to sell than post-meridian virtue. I have tried.'

"And he has to eat as often as any publisher. So there you are! People are not going to pay him for finding fault with something they are intensely satisfied with. It all comes back to the women. When their taste is corrected we shall have better novels. But not before then!"

"Mr. Wilson," I said, "do you believe that the

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development of the magazine, with its high prices and serialization, has been harmful or beneficial to fiction?"

"In the first place, the magazine hasn't developed," he answered. "It has merely multiplied—the cheap ones, I mean. And prices have not increased except to about a dozen of our national favorites. Where there is one writer who can get fifteen hundred dollars for a short story, or fifteen thousand dollars for the serial rights to a novel, there are a thousand who can get not more than a fifteenth of those prices.

"On the whole, I think that the effect of the cheap monthlies has been good. They are the only ones that welcome the new writer. They try him out. Then, if the public takes to him, the better magazines find it out after a while and form an alliance with him—that is, if his characters are so sweet and wholesome that the magazine can still be left on the center-table where Cuthbert or Berryl might see it after school.

"Nowadays I never expect to find a good short story in any of the cheap magazines. Of course, it does happen now and then, but not often enough to make me impatient for their coming. And, of course, the cheap monthlies do print, for the

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most part, what are probably the worst short stories that will ever be written in the world—the very furthest from anything real.

“These writers, too, like the novelists, study one another instead of life. We will say one of them writes a short story about a pure young shopgirl of flower-like beauty who, spending an evening of innocent recreation in a notorious Tenderloin dive (one of those places that I, for one, have never been able to find), is insulted by the leader of Tammany Hall, who is always hanging around there for evil purposes. At the last moment she is saved from his loathsome advances by a dashing young stranger in a cute-cut blue serge suit, who carries her off in a taxicab and marries her at 2 A.M. And he, of course, proves to be the great traction magnate who owns all the city’s surface-car lines.

“The other writers, and some new ones that never before thought of writing, read this story, which is called ‘All for Love,’ and learn to do the ‘type’—the pure young shopgirl, a bit slangy in spite of her flower-like beauty; the abhorrent politician (some day he will have a distressing mix-up with his very own daughter in one of these evil places—see if he doesn’t!), the low-browed dive-

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keeper, and the honest young traction magnate. They will learn with a little practice to do these as the dupes of the 'Be-a-cartoonist!' schools learn to draw 'An Irishman,' 'A German,' 'A Jew,' and the dental façade of Colonel Roosevelt.

"But we must remember that O. Henry came to us from the cheap magazines, never did get into the higher-priced ones, and was, by the way, wretchedly paid for his stories. True, he received good prices in his later days, but I doubt if they raised the average for his output to two hundred dollars a story. He neglected to come to the feast in a wedding garment, so the more pretentious magazines would have none of him.

"For one O. Henry, then, we can forgive the lesser monthlies for the bulk of their stuff that can be read only by born otoliths. The more magazines, the better our chance of finding the new man, and only in the cheap ones can he come to life."

Many dogmatic statements have been made concerning the great American novel. I have been told that it would come from the South, that it would come from the West, that it would never be written. But Mr. Wilson has a new and revolutionary theory.

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“Will there,” I asked, “ever be the great American novel? That is, will there ever be a novel which reflects American life as adequately as *Vanity Fair* reflects English life?”

“There have already been dozens of them!” was Mr. Wilson’s emphatic reply. “To go no farther back, Booth Tarkington wrote one the other day, and so did Theodore Dreiser. (Dreiser’s story, ‘The “Genius,”’ of course couldn’t have appeared in any American magazine. Trust your canny publisher not to let his magazine hand know what his book hand is doing!)

“But let us lay forever that dear old question that has haunted our literary columns for so many years. The answer, of course, is that there is no novel that reflects English life any more adequately than *The Turmoil*, or ‘*The Genius*,’ or *The Virginian*, or *Perch of the Devil*, or *Unleavened Bread*, or *The Rise of Silas Lapham* reflects American life.

“Certainly *Vanity Fair* doesn’t do this. It reflects but a very narrow section of London life. For the purposes of fictional portrayal England is just as big and difficult—as impossible in one novel—as the United States.

“To know England through fiction one must

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go to all her artists, past and present, getting a little from each. Hardy gives us an England that Thackeray never suspected, and Galsworthy gives us still another, not to go on to the England of George Moore, Phillpotts, Quiller-Couch, Wells, Bennett, Walpole, George, or Mackenzie. I hope at the proper time that a tasteful little tablet will be erected to my memory for having laid this ancient and highly respectable apparition."

In his interesting contribution to a symposium of opinions as to what are the six best novels in the English language, Mr. Wilson had some things to say about Dickens which were not likely to bring him a vote of thanks from the Dickens Fellowship. I wished to have his opinion of Dickens stated more definitely, and so, basing my question on a statement he had made in the symposium, I asked, "What qualities in the work of Charles Dickens make him a bad model for novelists to follow?"

Mr. Wilson replied: "Dickens has been a blight to most writers who were susceptible to his vices. He was a great humorist, but an inferior novelist, and countless other inferior novelists have believed that they could be great humorists by following his childishly easy formula.

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“That is, those who were influenced by him copy his faults. Witness our school of characterization based on the Dickens method, a school holding that ‘character’ is a mere trick of giving your creation exaggerated mannerisms or physical surfaces—as with Dickens it was rarely anything else.

“Dickens created vaudeville ‘characters’—unsurpassed for twenty-minute sketches, deadly beyond that to the mentally mature. His stock in trade was the grotesque make-up. In stage talk he couldn’t create a ‘straight’ part.

“Strip his people of their make-ups, verbal, hirsute, sartorial, surgical, pathological, what not—and dummies remain. Meet them once and you know them for the rest of the tale, the Micawbers, Gamps, Pecksniffs, Nicklebys; each has his stunt and does it over and over at each new meeting, to the—for me, at least—maddening delay of the melodrama. I like melodrama as well as any one, badgered heroines, falsely accused heroes, missing wills, trap-doors, disguised philanthropists, foul murders, and even slow-dying children who are not only moralists, but orators; and I like to see the villain get his at last, and get it good; but I can’t read Dickens any more, be-

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cause the tale must be held up every five minutes for one of the funny 'characters' to do his stunt.

"How many years will it take us—writers, I mean—to realize that there are no characters in Dickens in the sense that Dmitri in *The Brothers Caramazov* is a character? How few of our current novelists can distinguish between the soulless caricaturing of Dickens and the genuine character-drawing of a Turgenieff or a Dostoievski!

"How few of us can see how the soul of Dmitri is slowly unfolded to the reader with never a bit of make-up! To this moment, I don't know if he wore a beard or not; but I know the man. Dickens would have given him funny whiskers, astigmatism, a shortened leg, a purple nose, and still to make sure we wouldn't mistake him a catch phrase for his utterance.

"Any novelist who has mastered the rudiments of his craft, even though he hasn't an atom of humor in his make-up, can write a Dickens novel, and any publisher will print it for the Christmas trade if it's fairly workman-like, and it will be warmly praised in the reviews. That happens every season.

"And that's why Dickens is a bad model. If one must have a model, why not Hall Caine, in-

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finitely the superior of Dickens as a craftsman? Of course, having no humor, he can't be read by people who have, but he knows his trade, where Dickens was a preposterous blunderer."

Charles Belmont Davis once told me that a novelist should have some other regular occupation besides writing. I asked Mr. Wilson his opinion on this subject.

"Mr. Davis didn't originate this theory," he said. "It's older than he is. Anyway, I don't believe in it. I know of no business to-day that would leave a man time to write novels, and a novelist worth his salt won't have time for any other business.

"Of course, the ideal novelist would at one time or another have been anything. The ideal novelist has two passions, people and words, and he should have had and should continue to have as many points of contact with life as possible. But if he has reached the point where he can write to please me, I want him not to waste time doing anything else.

"Personally, I wish I might have been, for varying intervals, a Russian Grand Duke, an Eighth Avenue undertaker, the manager of a five-and-ten-cent store, a head waiter, a burglar, a desk ser-

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geant at the Thirtieth Street Police Station, and a malefactor of great wealth, preferably one that gets into the snapshots at Newport, reading from left to right. But Heaven has denied me practically all of these avenues to a knowledge of my humankind, and I am too busy keeping up with the current styles of all millinery fiction to take to any of them at this late day.

“Besides, I have a bad example to deter me, having just read *The High Priestess*, by Robert Grant, who has another business than novel writing—something connected with the law, I believe, in Boston. I have no means of knowing how valuable a civic unit he may have been in his home town, but I do feel that he has cheated the world of a great deal by keeping to this other business, whatever it may be.

“From the author of *Unleavened Bread* we once had a right to expect much. But *The High Priestess* chiefly makes me regret that he didn't have to write novels or starve; by its virtues of construction, which are many and admirable, and by its utter lack of power to communicate any emotion whatsoever, which is conspicuous and lamentable. He seems to have written his novel with an adding-machine, and instinctively I blame

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that 'other business' of his, in which he seems to have forgotten—for he did know it once—that a novelist may or may not think straight, but he must feel.

"Perhaps he wasn't a real novelist, after all. I suspect a real novelist would starve in any other business."

I told Mr. Wilson that a prominent American humorist writer had classed Mark Twain with Artemus Ward and Philander Doesticks, and said that these men were not genuine humorists, but "the Charlie Chaplins of their time."

Mr. Wilson smiled. "Isn't this rather high praise for Charlie Chaplin?" he asked. "How far is this idolatry of the movie actor to go, anyway? True, Mr. Chaplin is a skilled comedian, pre-eminent in his curious new profession, but to my thinking he lacks repose at those supreme moments when he is battering the faces of his fellow-histrions with the wet mop or the stuffed club, or walking on their stomachs; but I may be prejudiced. I know I shouldn't have ranked him with Mark Twain, arch-humanist and satirist and one of the few literary artists who have attained the world stature—so that we must go back and back to Cervantes to find his like."

THE PASSING OF THE SNOB

EDWARD S. MARTIN

THE PASSING OF THE SNOB

EDWARD S. MARTIN

IF William Makepeace Thackeray were alive to-day he would not write a *Book of Snobs*. He might write a *Book of Reformers*.

This is the opinion of that shrewd and kindly satirist, Edward S. Martin. I found him not in New York, the city whose lights and shadows are reflected in much of his graceful prose and pungent verse, but out among the Connecticut hills. In the pleasant study of his quaint Colonial cottage he talked about the thing he delights to observe—humanity.

“Thackeray would not write a *Book of Snobs* to-day,” he said. “The snob is not now the appealing subject that he was in the early days of the reign of Queen Victoria. Thackeray could not now find enough snobs and snobbery to write about, either in England or in America. Snobs are by way of having punctured tires these days.

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“Don’t you think that the snobs were always very much apart from our civilization and national ideals? They were a symptom of an established and conservative society. And this established and conservative society Thackeray in his way helped to break down.

“To-day, in England and in the United States, that kind of society is in a precarious condition. If Thackeray were now writing, he would not satirize snobs. It is more likely that he would satirize the reformers. I think that all the snobs have hit the sawdust trail.”

“How did this happen?” I asked. “What was it that did away with the snobs?”

“It was largely a natural process of change,” said Mr. Martin. “The snobs were put on the defensive. You see, there is a harder push of democracy now than there was in Thackeray’s time. The world of which the snob was so conspicuous a part seems, especially since the war began, to have passed away. Of course the literature of that world is not dead, but for the moment it seems obsolete.

“To-day the whole attention of civilized mankind is fixed on the great fundamental problems; there is no time for snobbery. For one thing,

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there is the problem of national self-preservation. And there has recently been before the civilized world, more strongly than ever before, the great problem of the development of democracy.

"I suppose that the war will check, to a certain extent, the development of democracy. In England the great task of the hour is to organize all the powers of society for defense against attack, against attack by a power organized for forty years for that attack.

"I suppose England will get organization out of this war. And if we get into the war, we'll get organization out of it."

Mr. Martin is generally thought of as a critic of social rather than political conditions. But he is keenly interested in politics. Speaking of American politics and the possibility of America's entering the war, he said:

"For the past fifteen years our greatest activity in politics has been to rip things open. It seemed to most people that the organization was getting too strong and that it was controlled by too few people. The fight has been against that condition.

"But if we became involved in a serious war trouble the energy of our people would be directed to an attempt to secure increased efficiency. We

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would become closely organized again. I don't think we'd lose the benefit of what has been done in the past years, but we would come to a turn in the road.

"I suppose it would bring us all together, if we got into this war, and I suppose we'd get some good out of it.

"You see, the people who formerly directed our Government haven't had much power for several years. Now they are valuable people. And they will come back into power again, but with greatly modified conditions.

"I don't think that a new set of people are going to manage the affairs of the nation. I think that the affairs of the nation will be managed by the people who managed them before. But these people will be much more under control than they were before, and they will be subject to new laws.

"How much good government by commission is going to do I don't know. We have not as yet had good enough men to enter into this important work, and the best of those who have entered have not stayed in this employment. So the development of experts in government has not come along as well as people hoped it would."

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The genial philosopher smiled quizzically and rose from his chair.

"I'm afraid I'm getting too political," he said, pacing slowly up and down the room. "Let's get back to snobs and snobbery.

"You asked me a few minutes ago why the snob had become so inconspicuous a figure in our modern society. Well, I know one reason for this altered condition of affairs. Woman has abolished the snob. Woman has changed man."

"And what changed woman?" I asked.

"Many things; the development of machinery, for instance," he replied. "Woman has not changed so much as the conditions of life have changed.

"The development of machinery has caused changes that impress me deeply. It has produced immense alterations in the conditions of life and in the relations between people.

"War has been changed in a striking manner by this development of machinery. Never in the history of warfare was machinery so prominent and important as to-day. In fact, I think I am justified in speaking of this war as a machine-bore!

"Machinery really has had a great deal to do

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with changing the condition and activities of woman, and has been a powerful influence in bringing about the modern movement for women's suffrage. Machinery has changed the employment of women and forced them into kinds of work which are not domestic.

"The typewriter and the telephone have revolutionized our methods of doing business. The typewriter and the telephone have filled our offices with women. They are doing work which twenty years ago would have been considered most unfeminine.

"The war is strengthening this tendency of women to take up work that is not domestic. I have heard it said that women first got into the undomestic kinds of business in France during the Napoleonic wars. Napoleon wanted to have all the men out in the line of battle, so he had girls instructed in bookkeeping and other kinds of office work.

"The business activities of Frenchwomen date from that time. And a similar result seems to be coming out of this war. In France, in England, in all the countries engaged in the war the women are filling the positions left vacant by the men."

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“Do you think,” I asked, “that this is a good thing for civilization, this increased activity of women in business?”

“I don’t know,” said Mr. Martin, musingly. “I don’t know. But I do know this, that the main employment of woman is to rear a family. Office work, administrative work—these things are of only secondary importance. The one vital thing for women to do is to rear families. They must do this if the human race is to continue.”

“Mr. Martin,” I said, “you told me that Thackeray, if he were alive, would satirize the reformers. Just what sort of reformer is it that has taken the place of the snob?”

Mr. Martin did not at once answer. He smiled, as if enjoying some entertaining memory. Then he started to speak, and mentioned the name of a prominent reformer. But his New England caution checked him. He said:

“No, I’d better not say anything about that. I’d rather not. I’d rather say that the things that the snobs admired and particularly embodied have lost prestige during the last twenty years.

“After 1898, after our great rise to prosperity, the captains of industry and of finance were the

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ticularly the work presented to the public on the pages of magazines.

“Just now,” he said, “the newspapers seem to have almost everything. The great interest of the last few years has been in the newspapers. They have had a tremendous story to tell, they have told it every day, and other things have seemed, in comparison, flat and lifeless.

“It has been a hard time for every sort of a publication not absolutely up to the minute all the time. The newspapers have had the field almost to themselves.

“And I think that the newspapers have greatly improved. They have had an immense chance, and it has been very stimulating.”

COMMERCIALIZING THE SEX INSTINCT

ROBERT HERRICK

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ROBERT HERRICK

“REALISM,” said Robert Herrick, “is not the celebration of sexuality.” I had not recalled to earth that merry divine whose lyric invitation to go a-Maying still echoes in the heart of every lover of poetry. The Robert Herrick with whom I was talking is a poet and a discriminating critic of poetry, but the world knows him chiefly for his novels—*The Common Lot*, *Together*, *Clark’s Field*, and other intimate studies of American life and character. He is a realist, and not many years ago there were critics who thought that his manner of dealing with sexual themes was dangerously frank. Therefore, the statement that he had just made seemed to me particularly significant.

“It seems to have become the fashion,” he said, “to apply the term Realist to every writer who is obsessed with sex. I think I know the

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reason for this. Our Anglo-Saxon prudery kept all mention of sex relations out of our fiction for many years. Among comparatively modern novelists the realists were the first to break the shackles of this convention, and write frankly of sex. And from this it has come, most unfortunately, that realism and pornography are often confused by novelists and critics as well as by the public.

“This confusion of ideas was apparent in some of the criticisms of my novel *Together*. In an early chapter of the book there was an incident which was intended to show that the man and woman who were the chief figures in the book were spiritually incompatible, that their relations as husband and wife would be wrong. This was, in fact, the theme of the book, and this incident in the first chapter was intended to foreshadow the later events of their married life. Well, the critics who disliked this chapter said that what they objected to was its ‘gross realism.’

“Now, as a matter of fact, that part of the book was not realistic at all. I was describing something unusual, abnormal, while realism has to do with the normal. The critic had, of course, a perfect right to believe that the subject ought

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not to be treated at all, but 'gross realism' was the most inappropriate description possible.

"Undoubtedly there are many writers who believe that they are realists because they write about nothing but sex. Undoubtedly, too, there are many writers who are conscious of the commercial value of sex in literature. Of course a writer ought to be conscious of the sex impulse in life, but he ought not to display it constantly. I wish our writers would pay less attention to the direct manifestations of sex and more to its indirect influence, to the ways in which it affects all phases of activity."

"Who are some of the writers who seem to you to be especially ready to avail themselves of the commercial value of sex?" I asked.

Mr. Herrick smiled. "I think you know the writers I mean without my mentioning their names," he said. "They write for widely circulated magazines, and make a great deal of money, and their success is due almost entirely to their industrious celebration of sexual affairs. You know the sort of magazine for which they write—it always has on the cover a highly colored picture of a pretty woman, never anything else. That, too, is an example, and a rather weary-

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ing example, of the commercializing of the sex appeal.

“I think that Zola, although he was a great artist, was often conscious of the business value of the sex theme. He knew that that sort of thing had a tremendous appeal, and, for me, much of his best work is marred by his deliberate introduction of sex, with the purpose—which, of course, he realized—of making a sensation and selling large editions of his books. This sort of commercialism was not found in the great Russian realists, the true realist—Dostoievski, for example. But it is found in the work of some of the modern Russian writers who are incorrectly termed realists.”

“Mr. Herrick,” I asked, “just what is a realist?”

Mr. Herrick’s youthful face, which contrasts strangely with his white hair, took on a thoughtful expression.

“The distinction between realism and romanticism,” he said, “is one of spirit rather than of method. The realist has before him an aim which is entirely different from that of the romanticist.

“The realist writes a novel with one purpose in

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view. And that purpose is to render into written words the normal aspect of things.

“The aim of the romanticist is entirely different. He is concerned only with things which are exciting, astonishing—in a word, abnormal.

“I do not like literary labels, and I think that the names ‘realist’ and ‘romanticist’ have been so much misused that they are now almost meaningless. The significance of the term changes from year to year; the realists of one generation are the romanticists of the next.

“Bulwer Lytton was considered a realist in his day. But we think of him only as a sentimental and melodramatic romanticist whose work has no connection with real life.

“Charles Dickens was considered a realist by the critics of his own generation, and it is probable that he considered himself a realist. But his strongest instinct was toward the melodramatic. He wrote chiefly about simple people, it is true, and chiefly about his own land and time. But the fact that a writer used his contemporaries as subjects does not make him a realist. Dickens’s people were unusual; they were better or worse than most people, and they had extraordinary adventures; they did not lead the sort of life

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which most people lead. Therefore, Dickens cannot accurately be called a realist."

"You called Dostoievski a realist," I said. "What writers who use the English language seem to you to deserve best the name of realist?"

"I think," said Mr. Herrick, "that the most thoroughgoing realist who ever wrote in England was Anthony Trollope. *Barchester Towers* and *Framley Parsonage* are masterpieces of realism; they give a faithful and convincing picture of the every-day life of a section of English society with which their author was thoroughly familiar. Trollope reflected life as he saw it—normal life. He was a great realist.

"In the United States there has been only one writer who has as great a right to the name realist as had Anthony Trollope. That man is William Dean Howells. Mr. Howells has always been interested in the normal aspect of things. He has taken for his subject a sort of life which he knows intimately; he has not sought for extraordinary adventures for his theme, nor has he depicted characters remote from our experience. His novels are distinguished by such fidelity to life that he has an indisputable claim to be called a realist.

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“But, as I said, it is dangerous and unprofitable to attempt to label literary artists. Thackeray was a realist. Yet *Henry Esmond* is classed as a romantic novel. In that book Thackeray used the realistic method; he spent a long time in studying the manners and customs of the time about which he was writing; and all the details of the sort of life which he describes are, I believe, historically accurate. And yet *Henry Esmond* is a romance from beginning to end; it is a romantic novel written by a realist, and written according to what is called the realistic method.

“On the other hand, Sir Walter Scott was a romanticist. No one will deny that. Yet in many of his early books he dealt with what may be called realistic material; he described with close fidelity to detail a sort of life and a sort of people with which he was well acquainted.

“Whether a writer is a realist or a romanticist is, after all, I think, partly a matter of accident or culture. I happen to be a realist because I was brought up on the great Russian realists like Gogol and the great English realists from George Eliot down to Thomas Hardy. If I had been brought up on romantic writers I suppose that I might now be writing an entirely

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different sort of novel from that with which I am associated.

“There is a sounder distinction,” said Mr. Her-
rick, “than that which people try to draw between
the realistic novel and the romantic novel. This
is the distinction between the novel of character
and the novel of events. Personally, I never
have been able to see how the development of
character can be separated from the plot of a
novel. A book in which the characters exhibit
exactly the same characteristics, moral and in-
tellectual, in the last chapter as in the first,
seems to me to be utterly worthless.

“I will, however, make one exception—that is,
the novel of the Jules Verne type. In this sort
of book, and in romances of the Monte Cristo
kind, action is the only thing with which the
author and the reader are concerned, and any
attempt to develop character would clog the
wheels of the story.

“But every other kind of novel depends on
character. Even in the best work of Dumas,
in *The Three Musketeers*, for example, the char-
acters of the principal figures develop as the story
progresses.

“The highest interest of a novel depends upon

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the development of its characters. If the characters are static, then the book is feeble. I have never been able to see how the plot and the development of the characters can be separated.

“Of course, the novel of character is full of adventure. The adventures of Henry James’s characters are of absorbing interest, but they are psychological adventures, internal adventures. If some kind person wanted to give one of Henry James’s novels what is commonly called ‘a bully plot’ the novel would fail.”

As to the probable effect on literature of the war, Mr. Herrick has a theory different from that of any other writer with whom I have discussed the subject.

“I think,” he said, “that after the war we shall return to fatuous romanticism and weak sentimentality in literature. The tendency will be to read novels in order to forget life, instead of reading them to realize life. There will be a revival of a deeper religious sense, perhaps, but there will also be a revival of mere empty formalism in religion. It has been so in the past after great convulsions. Men need time to recover their spiritual pride, their interest in ideas.”

But Mr. Herrick’s own reaction to the war

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does not seem to justify his pessimistic prophecy. Certainly the personal experience which he next narrated to me does not indicate that Mr. Herrick is growing sentimental and romantic.

“When I was in Rome recently,” he said, “I was much impressed by D’Annunzio. I was interested in him as a problem, as a picturesque literary personality, as a decadent raffine type regenerated by the war. I have not read any of his books for many years.

“I took some of D’Annunzio’s books to read on my voyage home. I read *Il Piacere*. I realized its charm, I realized the highly æsthetic quality of its author, a scholarly and exact æstheticism as well as an emotional æstheticism. But, nevertheless, I had to force myself to read the book. It was simply a description of a young man’s amorous adventures. And I could not see any reason for the existence of this carefully written record of passional experiences.

“It seemed to me that the war had swept this sort of thing aside, or had swept aside my interest in this sort of thing. The book seemed to me as dull and trivial and as remote as a second-rate eighteenth-century novel. And I wondered if we would ever again return to the time when such a

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record of a young man's emotional and sensual experiences would be worth while.

"I came to the conclusion that D'Annunzio himself would not now write such a novel. I think that it would seem to him to be too trivial a report on life. I think that the war has so forced the essential things of life upon the attention of young men."

SIXTEEN DON'TS FOR POETS

ARTHUR GUITERMAN

SIXTEEN DON'TS FOR POETS

ARTHUR GUITERMAN

ARTHUR GUITERMAN has been called the Owen Seaman of America. Of course he isn't, any more than Owen Seaman is the Arthur Guiterman of England. But the verse which brings Arthur Guiterman his daily bread is turned no less deftly than is that of *Punch's* famous editor. Arthur Guiterman is not a humorist who writes verse; he is a poet with an abundant gift of humor.

Now, the author of *The Antiseptic Baby and the Prophylactic Pup* and *The Quest of the Riband*, and of those unforgettable rhymed reviews, differs from most other poets not only in possessing an abnormally developed sense of humor, but also in being able to make a comfortable living out of the sale of his verse. But when he talked to me recently he was by no means inclined to advise

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all able young poets to expect their poetry to provide them with board and lodging.

“Of course it is possible to make a living out of verse,” he said. “Walt Mason does, and so does Berton Braley. And now most of my income comes from my verse. Formerly I wrote short stories, but I haven’t written one for seven or eight years.

“Nevertheless, I think it is inadvisable for any one to set out with the idea of depending on the sale of verse as a means of livelihood. You see, there are, after all, two forms, and only two forms, of literary expression—the prose form and the verse form. Some subjects suit the prose form, others suit the verse form. Any one who makes writing his profession has ideas severally adapted to both of these forms. And every writer should be able to express his idea in whichever of these two forms suits it better.

“Now, the verse form is older than the prose form. And so I have come to look upon it as the form peculiarly attractive to youth. Many writers outgrew the tendency to use the verse form, but some never outgrew it. Sir Walter Scott was a verse-writer before he was a prose-writer, and so was Shakespeare. So were many

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modern writers — Robert W. Chambers, for example.

“This theory is true especially in regard to lyric verse. The lyric is nearly always the work of a young man. As a man grows older he sings less and preaches more. Certainly this was true of Milton.

“I never thought that I should write verse for a living. But verse happens to be the medium that I love. I ran across my first poem the other day—it was about fireflies, and I was eight years old when I wrote it. Certainly nearly all writers write verse before they write prose; perhaps it is atavistic. I don't know that Henry James began with verse. But I would be willing to bet that he did.

“One trouble with a great many people who make a living out of writing verse is that they feel obliged always to be verse-writers, never to write prose, even when the subject demands that medium. Alfred Noyes gives us an example of this unfortunate tendency in his *Drake*. I am not disparaging Alfred Noyes's work; he has written charming lyrics, but in *Drake*, and perhaps in some of the *Tales from the Mermaid Tavern*, I feel that he has written verse not be-

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cause the subject was especially suited to that medium, but because he felt that he was a verse-writer and therefore should not write prose."

Mr. Guiterman is firmly convinced, however, that a verse-writer ought to be able, in time, to make a living out of his work.

"If a man calls himself a writer," he said, "he ought to be able to make a living out of writing. And I think that the writer of verse has a greater opportunity to-day than ever before. I don't mean to say that the appreciation of poetry is more intense than ever before, but it is more general. More people are reading poetry now than in bygone generations.

"Compare with the traditions that we have to-day those of the early nineteenth century, of the time of Byron and Sir Walter Scott. Then books of verse sold in large quantities, it is true, but to a relatively small public, to one class of readers. Now not only the poet, but also the verse-writer has an enormous public. If a really great poet should arise to-day he would find awaiting him a larger public than that known by any poet of the past. But it would be necessary for the poet to be great for him to find this public. Byron would be more generally appreciated to-day, if

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he were to live again, than he was in his own generation. I mention Byron because I think it probable that the next great poet will have something of Byron's dynamic quality."

"Who was the last great poet?" I asked.

"How is one to decide whether or not a poet is great?" asked Mr. Guiterman in turn. "My own feeling is that the late William Vaughn Moody was a great poet in the making. Perhaps he never really fulfilled his early promise; perhaps he went back to the themes of bygone ages too much in finding themes for his poetry. It may be that the next really great poet will sing an entirely different strain; it may be that I will be one of those who will say that his work is all bosh.

"But at any rate, he won't be an imitation Whitman or anything of that sort. He won't be any special school, nor will he think that he is founding a school. But it may be that his admirers will found a school with him as its leader, and they may force him to take himself seriously, and thus ruin himself."

Returning to the subject of the advisability of a writer being able to express himself in verse as well as in prose, Mr. Guiterman said:

"Especially in our generation is it true that

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good verse requires extreme condensation. In most work to-day brevity is desirable. The epigram beats the epic. If Milton were living to-day he would not write epics. I don't think it improbable that we have men with Miltonic minds, and they are not writing epics.

“If a man finds that he cannot express his idea in verse more forcefully than he can in prose, then he ought to write prose. Very often a writer is interested in some little incident which he would not be justified in treating in prose, something too slight to be the theme of a short story. This is the sort of thing which he should put into verse. There is Leigh Hunt's *Jennie Kissed Me*, for example. Suppose he had made a short story of it.”

Thinking of this poet's financial success, I asked him just what course he would advise a young poet to pursue who had no means of livelihood except writing.

“Well, the worst thing for him to do,” said Mr. Guiterman, “would be to devote all his attention to writing an epic. He'd starve to death.

“I suppose the best thing for him to do would be to write on as many subjects as possible, including those of intense interest to himself. What

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interests him intensely is sure to interest others, and the number of others whom it interests will depend on how close he is by nature to the mind of his place and time. He should get some sort of regular work so that he need not depend at first upon the sale of his writings. This work need not necessarily be literary in character, although it would be advisable for him to get employment in a magazine or newspaper office, so that he may get in touch with the conditions governing the sale of manuscripts.

“He should write on themes suggested by the day’s news. He should write topical verse; if there is a political campaign on, he should write verse bearing upon that; if a great catastrophe occurs, he should write about that, but he must not write on these subjects in a commonplace manner.

“He should send his verses to the daily papers, for they are the publications most interested in topical verse. But also he should attempt to sell his work to the magazines, which pay better prices than the newspapers. If it is in him to do so, he should write humorous verse, for there is always a good market for humorous verse that is worth printing. He should look up the publishers

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of holiday cards, and submit to them Christmas, Thanksgiving, and Easter verses, for which he would receive, probably, about five dollars apiece. He should write advertising verses, and he should, perhaps, make an alliance with some artist with whom he can work, each supplementing the work of the other."

"Mr. Guiterman," I said, "is this the advice that you would give to John Keats if he were to ask you?"

"Yes, certainly," said Mr. Guiterman. "But you understand that our hypothetical poet must all the time be doing his own work, writing the sort of verse which he specially desires to write. If his pot-boiling is honestly done, it will help him with his other work.

"He must study the needs and limitations of the various publications. He must recognize the fact that just because he has certain powers it does not follow that everything he writes will be desired by the editors. Marked ability and market ability are different propositions.

"If he finds that the magazines are not printing sad sonnets, he must not write sad sonnets. He must adapt himself to the demands of the day.

"There is high precedent for this course. You

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asked if I would give this advice to the young Keats. Why not, when Shakespeare himself followed the line of action of which I spoke? He began as a lyric poet, a writer of sonnets. He wrote plays because he saw that the demand was for plays, and because he wanted to make a living and more than a living. But because he was Shakespeare his plays are what they are.

“The poet must be influenced by the demand. There is inspiration in the demand. Besides the material reward, the poet who is influenced by the demand has the encouraging, inspiring knowledge that he is writing something that people want to read.”

I asked Mr. Guiterman to give me a list of negative commandments for the guidance of aspiring poets. Here it is:

“Don't think of yourself as a poet, and don't dress the part.

“Don't classify yourself as a member of any special school or group.

“Don't call your quarters a garret or a studio.

“Don't frequent exclusively the company of writers.

“Don't think of any class of work that you feel moved to do as either beneath you or above you.

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“Don’t complain of lack of appreciation. (In the long run no really good published work can escape appreciation.)

“Don’t think you are entitled to any special rights, privileges, and immunities as a literary person, or have any more reason to consider your possible lack of fame a grievance against the world than has any shipping-clerk or traveling-salesman.

“Don’t speak of poetic license or believe that there is any such thing.

“Don’t tolerate in your own work any flaws in rhythm, rhyme, melody, or grammar.

“Don’t use ‘e’er’ for ‘ever,’ ‘o’er’ for ‘over,’ ‘whenas’ or ‘what time’ for ‘when,’ or any of the ‘poetical’ commonplaces of the past.

“Don’t say ‘did go’ for ‘went,’ even if you need an extra syllable.

“Don’t omit articles or prepositions for the sake of the rhythm.

“Don’t have your book published at your own expense by any house that makes a practice of publishing at the author’s expense.

“Don’t write poems about unborn babies.

“Don’t — don’t write hymns to the great god Pan. He is dead; let him rest in peace!

“Don’t write what everybody else is writing.”

MAGAZINES CHEAPEN FICTION

GEORGE BARR M^CCUTCHEON

MAGAZINES CHEAPEN FICTION

GEORGE BARR McCUTCHEON

WHY is the modern American novel inferior to the modern English novel? Of course, there are some patriotic critics who believe that it is not inferior. But most readers of fiction speak of H. G. Wells and Compton Mackenzie, for example, with a respect and admiration which they do not extend to living American novelists.

Why is this? Is it because of snobbishness or literary colonialism on the part of the American public? George Barr McCutcheon does not think so. The author of *Beverly of Graustark* and many another popular romance believes that there is in America a force definitely harmful to the novel. And that force is the magazine.

“The development of the magazine,” he said to me, “has affected fiction in two ways. It has made it cheap and yet expensive, if you know what I mean.

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“Novels written solely with the view to sensationalism are more than likely to bring discredit, not upon the magazine, but upon the writer. He gets his price, however, and the public gets its fiction.

“In my humble opinion, a writer should develop and complete his novel without a thought of its value or suitability to serial purposes. He should complete it to his own satisfaction—if that is possible—before submitting it to either editor or publisher. They should not be permitted to see it until it is in its complete form.”

“But you yourself write serial stories, do you not?” I asked.

“I have never written a serial,” answered Mr. McCutcheon. “Some of my stories have been published serially, but they were not written as serials.

“I am quite convinced in my own mind that if we undertake to analyze the distinction between the first-class English writers of to-day and many of our Americans, we will find that their superiority resolves itself quite simply into the fact that they do not write their novels as serials. In other words, they write a novel and not a series of chapters, parts, and instalments.”

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“Do you think that the American novel will always be inferior to the English novel?” I asked. “Is it not probable that the American novel will so develop as to escape the effects of serialization?”

“There is no reason,” Mr. McCutcheon replied, “why Americans should not produce novels equal to those of the English, provided the same care is exercised in the handling of their material, and that they make haste as slowly as possible. Just so long, however, as we are menaced by the perils of the serial our general output will remain inferior to that of England.

“I do not mean to say that we have no writers in this country who are the equals in every respect of the best of the English novelists. We have some great men and women here, sincere, earnest workers who will not be spoiled.”

Mr. McCutcheon has no respect for the type of novel, increasingly popular of late, in which the author devotes page after page to glowing accounts of immorality with the avowed intention of teaching a high moral lesson. He has little faith in the honesty of purpose of the authors of works of this sort.

“The so-called sex novel,” he said, “is one of our gravest fatalities. I may be wrong, but I

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am inclined to think that most novels of that character are written, not from an æsthetic point of view, but for the somewhat laudable purpose of keeping the wolf from the door and at the same time allowing the head of the family to ride in an automobile of his own.

“The typical serial writer is animated by the desire, or perhaps it is an obligation, to make the ‘suspended interest’ paramount to all else. This interest must not be allowed to flag between instalments.

“The keen desire for thrills must be gratified at all costs. It is commanded by the editor—and I do not say that the editor errs. His public expects it in a serial. It must not be disappointed.”

I asked Mr. McCutcheon if he believed that a writer could produce sensational and poorly constructed fiction in order to make a living and yet keep his talent unimpaired; if a writer was justified in writing trash in order to gain leisure for serious work. He replied:

“There are writers to-day who persist in turning out what they vaingloriously describe as ‘stuff to meet the popular demand.’ They invariably or inevitably declare that some day they will ‘be

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in a position to write the sort of stuff they want to write.'

"These writers say, in defense of their position, that they are not even trying to do their best work, that they are merely biding their time, and that—some day! I very much doubt their sincerity, or, at any rate, their capacity for self-analysis. I believe that when an author sets himself down to write a book (I refer to any author of recognized ability), he puts into that book the best that is in him at the time.

"It is impossible for a good, conscientious writer to work on a plane lower than his best. Only hack writers can do such things.

"There is not one of us who does not do his best when he undertakes to write his book. We only confess that we have not done our best when a critic accuses us of pot-boiling, and so forth. Then we rise in our pride and say, 'Oh, well, I can do better work than this, and they know it.'

"It is true that we may not be doing the thing that we really want to do, but I am convinced that we are unconsciously doing our best, just the same. It all resolves itself into this statement—a good workman cannot deliberately do a poor piece of work.

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“I am free to confess that I have done my very best in everything I have undertaken. It may fall short of excellence as viewed from even my own viewpoint, but it is the best I know how to do.

“So you may take it from me that the writer who declares that he is going to do something really worth while, just as soon as he gets through doing the thing that the public expects him to do, is deceiving himself and no one else. An author cannot stand still in his work. He either progresses or retrogrades, and no man progresses except by means of steady improvement. He cannot say, ‘I will write a poor book this year and a great book next year.’”

Mr. McCutcheon is so unashamedly a romanticist that I expected to find him an enthusiastic partisan of the first and greatest master of the romantic novel in English. But, to my surprise, he said:

“I suppose the world has outgrown Sir Walter Scott’s novels. It is quite natural that it should. The world is older and conditions have changed. The fairest simile I can offer in explanation is that as man himself grows older he loses, except in a too frequently elastic memory, his interest in the things that moved him when he was a boy.”

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But while Mr. McCutcheon believes (in defiance of the opinion of the publishers who continue to bring out, year by year, their countless new editions of the Waverley Novels in all the languages of the civilized world) that the spell of the Wizard of the North has waned, he nevertheless believes that the romantic novel has lost none of its ancient appeal.

"I do not believe," he said, "that the vogue of the romantic novel, or tale (which is a better word for describing the sort of fiction covered by this generic term), will ever die. The present war undoubtedly will alter the trend of the modern romantic fiction, but it will not in effect destroy it."

"How will it alter it?" I asked.

"Years most certainly will go by," he replied, "before the novelist may even hope to contend with the realities of this great and most unromantic conflict. Kings and courtiers are very ordinary, and, in some cases, ignoble creatures in these days, and none of them appears to be romantic.

"We find a good many villains among our erstwhile heroes, and a good many heroes among our principal villains. People will not care to read war novels for a good many years to come, but

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it is inevitable that future generations will read even the lightest kind of fiction dealing with this war, horrible though it is. Just so long as the world exists there will be people who read nothing else but the red-blood, stirring romantic stories.

“There exists, of course, a class of readers who will not be tempted by the romantic, who will not even tolerate it, because they cannot understand it. That class may increase, but so will its antithesis.

“I know a man who has read the Bible through five or six times, not because he is of a religious turn of mind or even mildly devout, but because there is a lot of good, sound, exciting romance in it! A man who is without romance in his soul has no right to beget children, for he cannot love them as they ought to be loved. They represent romance at its best. He is, therefore, purely selfish in his possession of them.”

Mr. McCutcheon had spoken of the probable effect of the war on the popular taste for romantic fiction. I reminded him of William Dean Howells's much-quoted statement, “War stops literature.”

“War stops everything else,” said Mr. McCutcheon, “so why not literature? It stops everything, I amend. except bloodshed, horror, and heartache.

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“And when the war itself is stopped, you will find that literature will be revived with farming and other innocent and productive industries. I venture to say that some of the greatest literature the world has ever known is being written to-day. Out of the history of this titanic struggle will come the most profound literary expressions of all time, and from men who to-day are unknown and unconsidered.”

I asked Mr. McCutcheon if he did not believe that the youthful energy of the United States was likely to make its citizens impatient of romance, that quality being generally considered the exclusive property of nations ancient in civilization. He did not think so.

“America,” he said, “is essentially a romantic country, our great and profound commercialism to the contrary notwithstanding. America was born of adventure; its infancy was cradled in romance; it has grown up in thrills. And while to-day it may not reflect romance as we are prone to consider it, there still rests in America a wonderful treasure in the shape of undeveloped possibilities.

“We are, first of all, an eager, zestful, imaginative people. We are creatures of romance. We

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do two things exceedingly well—we dream and we perform.

“Our dreams are of adventure, of risk, of chance, of impossibilities, and of deeds that only the bold may conceive. And we find on waking from these dreams that we have performed the deeds we dreamed of.

“The Old World looks upon us as braggarts. Perhaps we are, but we are kindly, genial, smiling braggarts—and the braggart is, after all, our truest romanticist.

“I like to hear a grown man admit that he still believes in fairies. That sort of man thinks of the things that are beautiful, even though they are invisible. And—if you stop to think about it—the most beautiful things in the world are invisible.”

BUSINESS INCOMPATIBLE WITH ART

FRANK H. SPEARMAN

BUSINESS INCOMPATIBLE WITH ART

FRANK H. SPEARMAN

THE late J. Pierpont Morgan writing sonnet sequences, Rockefeller regarding oil as useful only when mixed with pigment and spread upon canvas by his own deft hand, Carnegie designing libraries instead of paying for them—these are some of the entertaining visions that occur to the mind of Frank H. Spearman when he contemplates in fancy a civilization in which business no longer draws the master minds away from art.

I asked the author of *Nan of Music Mountain* if he thought that the trend of present-day American life—its commercialism and materialism—affected the character of our literature. He replied:

“Let us take commercialism first: By it you mean the pursuit of business. Success in business brings money, power, and that public esteem we may loosely term fame—the admiration of

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our fellow-men and the sense of power among them.

“Commercialism, thus defined, affects the character of our literature in a way that none of our students of the subject seems to have apprehended. We live in an atmosphere of material striving. Our great rewards are material successes. The extremely important consequence is that our business life through its greater temptations—through its being able to offer the rewards of wealth and mastery and esteem—robs literature and the kindred arts of our keenest minds. We have, it is true, eminent doctors and lawyers, but the complaint that commercialism has invaded these professions only proves that they depend directly on business prosperity for a substantial portion of their own rewards.

“I am not forgetting the crust and garret as the traditional setting for the literary genius; but, when this state of affairs existed, the genius had no chance to become a business millionaire within ten years—or, for that matter, within a hundred. And while poverty provides an excellent foundation for a career, it is not so good as a superstructure—at least, not outside the ranks of the heroic few who renounce riches for spiritual things.

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“More than once,” continued Mr. Spearman, “in meeting men among our masters of industry, I have been struck by the thought that these are the men who should be writing great books, painting great pictures, and building great cathedrals; their tastes, I have sometimes found, run in these directions quite as strongly as the tastes of lesser men who give themselves to literature, painting, or architecture. But the present-day market for cathedrals is somewhat straitened, and a great ambition may nowadays easily neglect the prospective rewards of literature for those of steel-making.

“Business success—not achieved in literature and the arts—comes first with us; in consequence, the ranks of those who follow these professions are robbed of the intellect that should contribute to them. This is the real way in which commercialism—our pursuit of business—affects our literature. It depletes, too, in the same way, the quality of men in our public life.

“Charles G. Dawes has called my attention more than once to the falling off in caliber among men from whose ranks our politicians and public men are drawn. It is not that our present administration is so conspicuously weak; go to any

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of the Presidential conventions this year and note the falling off in quality among the politicians. In one generation the change has been startling. The sons of the men that loomed large in public life twenty-five years ago to-day are masters of business.

“Business takes everything. We have had really magnificent financiers, such as the elder Morgan, who should be our Michael Angelo. I have known railroad executives who might have been distinguished novelists, and bankers who would have been great artists were the American people as obsessed with the painting of pictures and the making of statues as those of Europe once were.

“In Michael Angelo’s day public interest in solving problems in manufacture and transportation did not overshadow that in painting and sculpture. Leonardo in our day would be building railroads, digging canals, or inventing the aeroplane—and doing better, perhaps, at these things than any man living; he came perilously close to doing all of them in his own day.

“Before you can bring our steel-founders and business men into literature you must make success in literature and its kindred arts esteemed

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as the greatest reward. As it is, I fear it is likely to be chiefly those who through lack of capacity, inclination, or robust health are unequal to the heat and burden of great business that will be left for the secondary callings, among which we must at present rank literature. It would be interesting, too, to consider to what extent this movement of men toward business rewards has been compensated for by the opportunities afforded to women in the field thus deserted; we certainly have many clever women cultivating it."

"But what," I asked, "about materialism—not specifically commercialism, but materialism? Do you think that its evil effects are evident in contemporary literature?"

"Materialism—you mean the philosophy—has quite a different effect on any literature—a poisonous, a baneful effect, rather than a merely harmful one," Mr. Spearman answered. "Can you possibly have, at any time or anywhere, great art without a great faith? Since the era of Christianity, at any rate, it seems to me that periods of faith, or at least periods enjoying the reflexes and echoes of faith, have afforded the really nourishing atmosphere for artistic development. Spirituality provides that which the im-

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agination may seize upon for the substance of its creative effort; without spirituality the imagination shrivels, and the materialist, while losing none of his characteristic confidence, shrinks continually to punier artistic stature."

Something in what Mr. Spearman had said reminded me of Henry Holt's criticisms of the modern magazines. So I asked Mr. Spearman what effect the development of the American magazine, with its high prices for serials and series of stories, had had upon our fiction. He answered:

"Good, I think. Our fiction must compete in its rewards with those of business. One of the rewards of either—even if you put it, in the first case, the lowest—is the monetary reward, and the more substantial that can be made, the more chance fiction will have of holding up its head.

"I have had occasion to watch pretty closely the development of the inclinations and ambitions of a number of average American boys—boys that have had fairly intimate opportunities to consider both literature and business. I have been startled more than once to find that as each of them came along and was asked what he wanted to do, the substance of his answer has been, 'Something to make money.'

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“If you question your own youthful acquaintances, you will receive in most cases, I dare say, similar answers. I am afraid if Giotto had been a Wyoming shepherd-boy he would want to be a steel-maker. Anything that tends to attract the young to the pursuit of literature as a calling strengthens our fiction, and the magazine should have credit for an ‘assist’ in this direction. Don’t forget, of course, that the magazine itself derives directly, by way of advertising, from business.”

“Do you think, then,” I asked, “that our writers are producing work as likely to endure as that which is being produced in England?”

Mr. Spearman smiled whimsically. “Your question suggests to me,” he replied, “rather than any judgment in the case, the reflection that the average English writer has possessed over our average American writer the very great advantage of an opportunity to become really educated; to this extent their equipment is appreciably stronger than ours. If you will read the ordinary run of English fiction or play-writing and compare it with similar work of ours, you cannot fail to note the better finish in their work. And in expressing a conviction that our writers are somewhat handicapped as to this factor in their equip-

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ment, I do not indict them for wasted opportunities; I indict our own substantial failure in educational methods. For a generation or more we have experimented, and from the very first grade in our grammar-schools up to the university courses there have resulted confusion and ineptitude. I instance specifically our experimentation with electives and our widespread contempt for the classics. To attempt to master any of the arts and not to be intimately familiar with what the Greeks and the Romans have left us of their achievement—not to speak of those, to us, uncharted seas of medieval achievement in every direction following the twelfth century—is to make the effort under a distinct disadvantage.

“The average English writer has had much more of this intimacy, or at least a chance at much more of it, than the average American writer. In the sphere of literary criticism I have heard Mr. Brownell speak of the better quality of even the anonymous English literary criticism so frequently to be found in their journals when compared with similar American work. There is only one explanation for these things, and it lies in the training. All of this not implying, in indirect answer to your question, that the English

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writer is to bear away the prize in the competition for literary permanence. American Samsons may, despite everything, burst their bonds; but if they win it will often be without what their teachers should have supplied.

“Mr. Brownell, in his definitive essay on Cooper, in comparing the material at Balzac’s hand with that at Cooper’s, remarks on the fact that Cooper’s background was essentially nature. ‘Nothing, it is true, is more romantic than nature,’ adds Mr. Brownell, ‘except nature plus man. But the exception is prodigious.’ Europe measures behind her writers almost three thousand years of man.

“We have in this country no atmosphere of Christian tradition such as that which pervades Europe—English-speaking people parted with historic Christianity before they came here. But, willingly or unwillingly, the English and the Continental writers are saturated with this magnificent background of Christianity—they can’t escape it. And what I note as striking evidence of the value to them of this brooding spirit of twenty European centuries is the fact that their very pagans choose Christian material to work with. Goethe himself, fine old pagan that he

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was, turned to Christian quarries for his *Faust*. The minor pagans turn in likewise, though naturally with slighter results. But to all of them, Christianity, paraphrasing Samson, might well say: "If ye had not plowed with my heifer, ye had not read—your own riddle of longed-for recognition."

"Why is it that the art of fiction is no longer taken as seriously as it was, for example, in the time of Sir Walter Scott?"

"I don't know how seriously," countered Mr. Spearman, "you mean your question to be taken. It suggests that in the day of Walter Scott the field of novel-writing was still so new that only bolder spirits ventured into it. It was not a day when the many could attempt the novel with any assurances of success in marketing their wares. In consequence we got then the work of only big men and women. Pioneers—though not necessarily respectable—are a hardy lot.

"Still—touching on your other question about the great American novel—if I wished to develop great musicians I should start every one possible at studying music, and I can't help thinking that the more there are among us who attempt novels the greater probability there will be for the production of a masterpiece. A man's mind is a

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mine. Neither he nor any one else knows what is in it. Possessing the property in fee simple, he has, of course, certain valuable proprietary rights. But the only way I know of to find out to a certainty just what lies within the property is persistently to tunnel and drift, or, as Mr. Brownell says, 'to get out what is in you.' And I am in complete accord with him in the belief that temperament is the best possible endowment for a novelist—and temperament comes, if you are a Christian, from God; if a pagan, from the gods."

Mr. Spearman returned to his theme of the effect of materialism on literature in the course of a discussion of the French novel of the day as compared to the novel of Zola and his imitators. He said:

"I think the important thing for Zola was that his day coincided with a materialistic ascendancy in the thought of France. He lived at a time admirably suited to a man of his type. Zola found a France weak and contemptible in its government, and in consequence a soil in which grossness could profitably be cultivated.

"He was by no means a great artist; he was merely a writer writhing for recognition when he turned to filth. He took it up to commercialize

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it, to turn it into money and reputation. Men such as he are continually, at different times and in different countries, lifting their heads. But unless they are sustained by what chances to be a loose public attitude on questions of decency, they are clubbed into silence.

“And just why should the exploitation of filth assume to monopolize the word ‘realism’? To define precisely what realism should include and exclude would call for hard thinking. But it doesn’t take much thought to reach the conclusion that mere annalists of grossness have no proper monopoly of the term. Grossness is no adequate foundation for a literary monument; it is not even a satisfactory corner-stone. The few writers one thinks of that constitute exceptions would have left a better monument without it.

“But if you wish to realize how fortunate Zola was in coinciding with a period when the chief effort of the ruling spirits of France was to war on all forces that strove to conserve decency, try to imagine what sort of a reception *L’Assommoir* would be accorded to-day by the tears of France stricken through calamity to its knees.

“France is experiencing now realism of quite another sort from that propagated by Zola—a

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realism that is wringing the souls and turning the thoughts of a great and unhappy people back once more to the eternal verities; in these grossness never had a place.

“And if you don't want to think in grossness, don't read in it; if you don't want to act in grossness, don't think in it. To exploit it is to exaggerate its proper significance in the affairs of life.

“Twenty-five years ago an American writer set out as a Zola disciple to give us something American along Zola's lines. He made a failure of it—so complete that he was forced to complain that later efforts in which he returned to paths of decency were refused by editors and publishers. He had spoiled his name as an asset. If you are curious to note how far the bars have been let down in his direction in twenty-five years, contemplate what passes to-day among us with quite a footing of magazine and book popularity. It means simply that we are falling into those conditions of public indifference in which moral parasites may flourish. But if one were forced to-day to choose in France between the material taken up by Zola after his failure to cultivate successfully cleaner fields, and that chosen by René Bazin and the new and hopeful

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French school of spirituality, there could be no question that the latter would afford the better opportunity. And there can be no real question but that the exponents of grossness are likewise opportunists, looking first of all for a market for their names—as most men are doing. But some men, by reason of inclination or voluntary restraint, have restricted themselves in their choice of literary materials.”

Mr. Spearman has recently given much of his time to moving-picture work, with the result that his name is nearly as familiar to the devotees of the flickering screen as to habitual magazine readers. I asked him how the development of the moving picture is likely to affect literature. He replied:

“What I can say on this point will perhaps be more directly of interest to writers themselves; the development of the moving picture broadens their market. It has, if you will let me put it in this way, increased the number of our theaters in their capacity for absorbing material for the drama a thousandfold. Inevitably a new industry developing with such amazing rapidity is still in the experimental stages, and those who know it best say its possibilities are but just beginning. What I note of interest to the literary worker is that men

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advanced and in authority in the production of pictures have reached this conclusion: Behind every good picture there must be a good story. The slogan to-day is 'The story is the thing.' And those close to the 'inside' of the industry say to-day to the fictionist: 'Hold on to your stories. Within a year or two they will command from the movies much higher prices than to-day, because the supply is fast becoming exhausted.'"

It was in the course of his remarks about the rewards of literature that Mr. Spearman told an interesting story concerning Henry James and George du Maurier. He said:

"The recent death of Henry James is bringing out many anecdotes concerning him. At the time of George du Maurier's death it was recalled that he had once given the material for *Trilby* to Henry James with permission to use it; and the story ran that, resolving to use it himself, Mr. James returned the material to Du Maurier, who wrote the novel from it.

"But I don't think it has ever appeared that the real reason why Henry James did not attempt *Trilby* was that he possessed no musical sense; Mr. James himself told me this, and without a sense of music the material was useless to

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any one. I discussed the incident with him some ten years ago and he added, in connection with *Trilby* and Du Maurier, other interesting facts.

“*Trilby* did not at first make a signal success in England. Its first big hit was made in *Harper's Magazine*. Not realizing the American possibilities, Mr. du Maurier, when offered by Harper & Brothers a choice between royalties and five thousand dollars outright for the book rights, took the lump sum as if it were descended straight from heaven. When the news of the extraordinary success of the book in this country reached him, he realized his serious mistake, and in the family circle there was keen depression over it. But further surprises were in store for him. To their eternal credit, the house of Harper & Brothers—honorable then as now—in view of the unfortunate situation in which their author had placed himself, voluntarily canceled the first contract and restored Du Maurier to a royalty basis. The fear in the English home then was that this arrangement would come too late to bring in anything. Not only, however, did the book continue to sell, but the play came on, and together the rights afforded George du Maurier a competency that banished further worry from the home.”

THE NOVEL MUST GO

WILL N. HARBEN

THE NOVEL MUST GO

WILL N. HARBEN

THE novel is doomed. If the automobile, the aeroplane, and the moving picture continue to develop during the next ten years as they have developed during the last ten, people will cease almost entirely to take interest in fiction.

It was not Henry Ford who told me this. Neither was it Mr. Wright, nor M. Pathé. The man who made this ominous prophecy about the novel is himself a successful novelist. He is Will N. Harben, author of *Pole Baker*, *Ann Boyd*, *The Desired Woman*, and many other widely read tales of life in rural Georgia.

Although he is so closely associated with the Southern scenes about which he has written, Mr. Harben spends most of his time in New York nowadays. He justifies this course interestingly—but before I tell his views on this subject I will

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repeat what he had to say about this possible extinction of the novel.

"You have read," he said, "of the tremendous vogue of *Pickwick Papers* when it was first published. No work of fiction since that time has been received with such enthusiasm.

"In London at that time you would find statuettes of Pickwick, Mr. Winkle, and Sam Weller in the shop windows. There were Pickwick punch-ladles, Pickwick teaspoons, Pickwick souvenirs of all sorts.

"Now, when you walk down Broadway, do you find any reminders of the popular novels of the day? You do not, except of course in the bookshops. But you do find things that remind you of contemporary taste. In the windows of stationers and druggists you find statuettes not of characters in the fiction of the day, but of Charlie Chaplin.

"Of course the moving picture has not supplanted the novel. But people all over the country are becoming less and less interested in fiction. The time which many people formerly gave to the latest novel they now give to the latest film.

"And the moving picture is by no means the only thing which is weaning us away from the

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novel. The automobile is a powerful influence in this direction.

“Take, for instance, the town from which I come—Dalton, Georgia. There the people who used to read novels spend their time which they used to give to that entertainment riding around in automobiles. Sometimes they go on long trips, sometimes they go to visit their friends in near-by towns. But automobiling is the way in which they nowadays are accustomed to spend their leisure.

“Naturally, this has its effect on their attitude toward novels. Years ago, when Dalton had a population of about three thousand, it had two well-patronized bookshops. Now it has a population of about seven thousand and no bookshops at all!

“I suppose one of the reasons is that people live their adventures by means of the automobile, and therefore do not care so much about getting adventures from the printed page. But the chief reason is one of time—the fact is that people more and more prefer automobiling to reading.

“Now, if the aeroplane were to be perfected—as we have every reason to believe it will be—so that we could travel in it as we now do in the

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automobile, what possible interest would we have in reading dry novels? It seems likely that in a hundred years we will be able to see clearly the surface of Mars—do you think that people will want to read novels when this wonderful new world is before their eyes?

“The authors themselves are beginning to realize this. They are becoming more and more nervous. They are not the placid creatures that they were in Sir Walter Scott’s day. They feel that people are not as interested in them and their works as they used to be. I doubt very much if any publisher to-day would be interested, for example, in an author who produced a novel as long as *David Copperfield* and of the same excellence.”

“But do you think,” I asked, “that the fault is entirely that of the public? Haven’t the authors changed, too?”

“I think that the authors have changed,” said Mr. Harben, reflectively. “The authors do not live as they used to live.

“The authors no longer live with the people about whom they write. Instead, they live with other authors.

“Nowadays, an author achieves success by

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writing, we will say, about the people of his home in the Far West. Then he comes to New York. And instead of living with the sort of people about whom he writes, he lives with artists. That must have its effect upon his work."

"But is not that what you yourself did?" I asked. "A New York apartment-house is certainly the last place in the world in which to look for the historian of *Pole Baker!*"

Mr. Harben smiled. "But I don't live with artists," he said. "I try to live with the kind of people I write about. I resolved a long time ago to try to avoid living with literary people and to live with all sorts of human beings—with people who didn't know or care whether or not I was a writer.

"So I have for my friends and acquaintances sailors, merchants—people of all sorts of professions and trade. And people of that sort—people who make no pretensions to be artists—are the best company for a writer, for they open their hearts to him. A writer can learn how to write about humanity by living with humanity, instead of with other people who are trying to write about humanity."

"But at any rate you have left the part of the

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country about which you write," I said. "And wasn't that one of the things for which you condemned our hypothetical writer of Western tales?"

"Not necessarily," said Mr. Harben. "It sometimes happens that an author can write about the scenes he knows best only after he has gone away from them. I know that this is true of myself.

"It's in line with the old saws about 'distance lends enchantment' and 'emotion remembered in tranquillity,' you know. I believe that Du Maurier was able to write his vivid descriptions of life in the Latin Quarter of Paris because he went to London to do it.

"You see, I absorbed life in Georgia for many years. And in New York I can remember it and get a perspective on it and write about it."

"Then," I said, "you would go to Georgia, I suppose, if you wanted to write a story about life in a New York apartment?"

Mr. Harben thought for a moment. "No," he said, slowly, "I don't think that I'd go to Georgia to write about New York. I think that a novel about New York must be written in New York—while a novel about Dalton, Georgia, must be written away from Dalton, Georgia."

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“How do you account for that?” I asked.

“Well,” said Mr. Harben, “for one thing there is something bracing about New York’s atmosphere that makes it easier to write when one is here. Once I tried to write a novel in Dalton, and I simply couldn’t do it.

“And the reason why a novel about New York must be written in New York is because you can’t absorb New York as you might absorb Georgia, so to speak, and then go away and express it. New York is so thoroughly artificial that there is nothing about it which a writer can absorb.

“New York hasn’t the puzzles and adventures and surprises that Georgia has. Everybody knows about apartment-houses and skyscrapers and subways and elevators and dumb-waiters—there’s nothing new to say about them.

“I sometimes think that the reason why the modern novel about New York City is so uninteresting is because everybody tries to write about New York City. And their novels are all of one pattern—necessarily, because life in New York City is all of one pattern.

“In bygone days this was not true of New York. For instance, Mr. Howells’s novels about New York City were about a community in which

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people lived in real houses and had families and friends. In those days life in New York had its problems and surprises and adventures; it was not lived mechanically and according to a set pattern.

“What I have said about the advisability of an author’s leaving the scenes about which he is to write is not universally true. There are writers who do better work by staying in the place where the scenes of their stories are laid. For instance, Joel Chandler Harris did better work by staying in the South than he would have done if he had gone away.”

“But wasn’t that because his negro folk-tales were a sort of ‘glorified reporting’ rather than creative work?” I asked.

“No,” said Mr. Harben; “they were creative work. Joel Chandler Harris remembered just the bare skeleton of the stories as the negro had told them to him. And he developed them imaginatively. That was creative work. And he did most of his writing, and the best of his writing, in the office of *The Constitution*.”

“In view of what you said about the difficulty of absorbing New York life,” I suggested, “I suppose that, in your opinion, the great American novel will not be written about New York.”

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“What do you mean by the great American novel?” asked Mr. Harben. “So far as I know there is no great English novel or great Russian novel.”

“I suppose that the term means a novel inevitably associated with the national literature,” I said. “You cannot think of English literature without thinking of *Vanity Fair*, for instance. Certainly there is no American novel so conspicuously a reflection of our national life as that novel is of English life.”

“Well,” said Mr. Harben, “it is difficult to think of American literature or of American life without thinking of the novels of William Dean Howells. But the great American novel, to use that term, would be less likely to come into being than the great English novel.

“You see, the United States is not as compact as England. London, it may be said, is England; it has all the characteristics of England, and in the season all England may be met there.”

Mr. Harben is not in sympathy with the theories of some of our modern realists.

“The trouble with the average realist,” he said, “is that he doesn’t believe that the emotions are real. As a matter of fact, the greatest

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source of material for the novelist is to be found in the emotional and spiritual side of human nature. If writers were more receptive to spiritual and emotional impressions they would make better novels. It is the soul of man that the greatest novels are written about—there is Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment*, for example!"

In spite of his criticisms of some of the methods of the modern realists, Mr. Harben believes strongly in the importance of one realistic dogma, that which has to do with detailed description.

"Why is it that *Pepys's Diary* is interesting to us?" he asked. "It is because of its detail.

"But if Pepys had been a Howells—if he had been as careful in describing great things as he was in describing small things—then his *Diary* would be ten times more valuable to us than it is. And so Howells's novels will be valuable to people who read them a thousand years from now to get an idea of how we live.

"That is, Howells's novels will be valuable if people read novels in the years that are to come! Perhaps they will not be reading novels or anything else. For all we know, thought-transference may become as common a thing as telephony is now. And if this comes to pass nobody will read!"

LITERATURE IN THE COLLEGES

JOHN ERSKINE

LITERATURE IN THE COLLEGES

JOHN ERSKINE

BROWN of Harvard is no more. The play of that name may still be running, but of Harvard life it is now about as accurate a picture as *Trelawney of the Wells* is of modern English life. At Harvard, and at all the great American universities, the dashing, picturesque young athlete is no longer the prevailing type of the undergraduate ideal.

Of course, undergraduate athletics and undergraduate athletes persist—it would be a tragedy if they did not—but the type of youth that has been rather effectively denominated the “rah-rah boy” is increasingly difficult to find. His place has been taken, not by the “grind,” the plodding, prematurely old student, caring only for his books and his scholastic record, but by a normal young man, aware that the campus is not the

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most important place in the world; aware, in fact, that the university is not the universe.

This young man knows about class politics, but also about international politics; about baseball, but also about contemporary literature. He is much more a citizen than his predecessor of ten years since, less provincial, less aristocratic. And he not only enjoys literature, but actually desires to create it.

The chief enthusiasm at Harvard seems to be the drama; indeed, the Brown of Harvard to-day must be represented not as a crimson-sweatered gladiator but as a cross between Strindberg and George M. Cohan. At Columbia—I have Prof. John Erskine's word for it—there has lately developed a genuine interest in—what do you suppose? Poetry!

I interviewed the bulletin-board outside Hamilton Hall before I interviewed Professor Erskine, and it, too, surprised me. It was not the bulletin-board of my not altogether remote undergraduate days. It bore notices telling of a meeting of the "Forum for Religious Discussion," of an anti-militaristic mass-meeting, of a rehearsal of an Elizabethan drama. It was a sign of the times.

Professor Erskine said that undergraduate ideals

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had greatly changed during the last few years. I asked him how this had come to pass.

“Well,” he replied, “I think that college life reflects the ordinary life of the world more closely than is usually believed. This is a day of general cultural and spiritual awakening. The college student is waking, just as everybody else is waking; like everybody else, he is becoming more interested in the great things of life. There is no reason why the college walls should shut him in from the hopes, ambitions, and problems of the rest of humanity.

“It isn’t only the boys that have changed—the parents have changed too. Time was when the father and mother wanted their son to go to college so that he could join a group of pleasant, nice-mannered boys of good family. Now they have a definite idea of the practical value of a college education, they send their son to college intelligently.

“Also, the whole theory of teaching has changed. The purely Germanic system has been superseded by something more humane. The old idea of scholarship for its own sake is no longer insisted upon. Instead, the subjects taught are treated in their relation to life, the only way in which they can be of real interest to the students.

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“You will look in vain in the modern university for the old type of absent-minded, dry-as-dust professor. He has been superseded by the professor who is a man as well as a scholar. And naturally he approaches his subject and his classes in a different spirit from that of his predecessor.

“We have a new sort of teacher of English. He is not now (as was once often the case) a retired clergyman, or a specialist recruited from some unliterary field. He is, in many cases, a creative artist, a dramatist, a novelist, or a poet.

“When I was in college this was not generally true. Then such a professor as George Edward Woodberry or Brander Matthews was unique. Now the college wants poets and creative writers.”

These are Professor Erskine's actual words. I asked him to repeat his last statement and he said, apparently with no sense of the amazement which his words caused in me, “The college wants the poets!” The stone which the builders rejected is become the head of the corner.

But, then, there are poets and poets. There is, for example, Prof. Curtis Hidden Page. There is also one John Erskine, author of *Actæon and Other Poems*, and Adjunct Professor of English at Columbia University. There is also Prof.

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Alfred Noyes. But there are also some thousand or so poets in the United States who will be surprised to know that the college wants them. Academic appreciation of poets has generally consisted of a cordial welcome given their collected works two hundred years after their deaths.

“English as a cultural finish,” Professor Erskine continued, “has gone by the board. English is taught nowadays with as much seriousness as philosophy or history. Art in all its forms is considered as the history of the race, and treated seriously by the student as well as by the professor. To-day the students regard Shakespeare and Tennyson as very important men. They study them as in a course in philosophy they would study Bergson. Literature, philosophy, and history have been drawn together as one subject, as they should be.”

“What,” I asked, “are some of the extra-curricular manifestations of literary interest among the students?”

“In the first place,” he answered, “the extraordinary amount of writing done by the students. It is not at all unusual now for a Columbia student to sell his work to the regular magazines. The student who writes for the magazines and

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newspapers is no longer a novelty. Randolph Bourne, who was recently graduated, contributed a number of essays to the *Atlantic Monthly* during his junior and senior years.

“Many of the students write for the newspapers. The better sort of newspaper humorists have had a strong influence on the undergraduate mind; they have shown the way to writing things that are funny but have an intellectual appeal. This has resulted in the production of some really excellent light verse. Also, Horace’s stock has gone up.

“During the last two years some remarkable plays have been handed into the Columbia University Dramatic Association. Not only were they serious, but also they were highly poetic.

“And this,” said Professor Erskine, “marks what I hope is the distinguishing literary atmosphere at Columbia. The trend of the plays written by Columbia students is strongly poetic. This is not true, perhaps, of the plays written by students of other institutions. The writers of plays want to write poetic plays, and—what is perhaps even more surprising—the other students do not consider poetic drama ‘high-brow stuff.’

“Philolexian, the oldest of the Columbia liter-

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ary societies, has been producing Elizabethan plays. These plays have been enthusiastically received, and the enthusiasm does not seem to show any signs of dying down. The students come to the study of these plays with a feeling of familiarity, for they have seen them acted."

"Does this enthusiasm for literature show itself in the college magazine?" I asked.

"It shows itself," answered Professor Erskine, "by the absence of a literary magazine. The literary magazine has completely collapsed. In small colleges, far away from the cities where the regular magazines are published, the college magazine is the only available outlet for the work of the students who can write. But here in New York the students know the condition of the literary market, and the more skilful writers among them do not care to give their writings to an amateur publication when they can sell them off the campus. So the *Columbia Monthly* got only second-best material. The boys who really could write would not sacrifice their work by burying it in a college publication, so the *Columbia Monthly* died.

"The history of a literary club we have up here, called Boar's Head, is significant. It was

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started as a sort of revival of an older organization called King's Crown. At first the program consisted of an address at each meeting by some prominent writer. For a while the meetings were well attended, but gradually the interest died down.

"At length I found what the trouble was—the boys wanted to do their own entertaining. Now work by the members is read at every meeting; there are no addresses by outsiders.

"And here again the poetic trend of the undergraduate mind at Columbia is displayed. The Scribblers' Club, which consisted of short-story writers, is dead—there were not enough short-story writers to support it. And at the meetings of Boar's Head there have been read, during the past two years, only one or two short stories.

"The boys bring plays and poems to the Boar's Head meetings, but not short stories. Last year most of the poems which were read were short lyrics. Toward the end of last year and during the present year longer poems have been read. They are not poems in the Masefield manner; they are modeled rather on Keats and Coleridge. This fact has interested me because the magazines, as a rule, have not been buying long poems.

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I was interested to see that William Stanley Braithwaite, in his excellent *Anthology of Magazine Verse and Year-Book of American Poetry*, calls attention to the increasing popularity of the longer poem.

“Last year Boar’s Head decided to bring out a little book containing the best of the poems that were read at its meetings. A number of subscribers at twenty-five cents each were procured, and *Quad Ripples* was published. It contained only short poems. This year Boar’s Head has published *Odes and Episodes*, a collection of light verse by one of its former members, Archie Austin Coates. It soon will publish a collection of poems read at its meetings, and all these poems are long. Some of these poems are so good that it is a real sacrifice for the boys to have them printed in this book instead of in some magazine.

“Of course, there were always ‘literary men’ at Columbia, but they were considered unusual. Now they no longer even form a class by themselves. One of our best writers of light verse is the captain of the baseball team.

“Speaking of light verse and baseball,” continued Professor Erskine, “there is a certain connection between the *Columbia Monthly* and foot-

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ball, besides the obvious parallel which lies in the fact that both have ceased to exist. Some of the boys express eagerness to revive the college magazine, just as they express eagerness to revive football. But it is, I believe, merely a matter of pride with them. They are eager to have football and to have a college magazine; they are not so eager to contribute to the support of either institution.

“One proof of the literary renaissance of Columbia is that the essays written in the regular course of the work in philosophy and in English are better than ever before.”

“Do you believe,” I asked, “that being in the city has had a good effect on literary activity among Columbia students?”

He answered: “I do think so, decidedly. It has produced an extreme individualism and has given the boys enterprising minds. It is true that it has its disadvantages, it has made the student, so to speak, centrifugal, and has destroyed collegiate co-operation of the old sort. But it has produced an original, independent type of student.

“The older type of college student was interested in football because he knew that people

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expected him to be interested in football. The Columbia student of to-day is interested in poetry, not because it is a Columbia tradition to be interested in poetry, but because his tastes are naturally literary."

Several of the causes of this poetic renaissance at Columbia had been mentioned in the course of our conversation, but Professor Erskine had ignored one of the most important of them. So I will mention it now. It is John Erskine.

CITY LIFE VERSUS LITERATURE

JOHN BURROUGHS

CITY LIFE VERSUS LITERATURE

JOHN BURROUGHS

“WELL,” said John Burroughs, “she doesn’t seem to want us out here, so I guess we’ll have to go in.” So we left the little summer-house overlooking the Hudson and went into the bark-walled study.

Now, “she” was a fat and officious robin, and her nest was in a corner of the summer-house just over my head, as I sat with the poet-naturalist. The nest was full of hungry and unprepossessing young robins, and the mother robin seemed to be annoyed in her visits to it by our talk. As we walked to the study, leaving to the robin family undisputed possession of the summer-house, I heard John Burroughs say in tones of mild indignation, half to himself and half to me:

“I won’t stand this another year! This is the third year she’s taken possession of that summer-

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house, and next May she simply must build her nest somewhere else!"

Nevertheless, I think that this impudent robin will rear her 1917 brood in John Burroughs's summer-house, if she wants to.

When I walked up from the station to Riverby—John Burroughs's twenty-acre home on the west shore of the Hudson—I was surprised by the agility of my seventy-nine-year-old companion. He walked with the elastic step of a young man, and his eyes and brain were as alert as in the days when he showed Emerson and Whitman the wild wonders of the hills.

"Living in the city," he said, "is a discordant thing, an unnatural thing. The city is a place to which one goes to do business; it is a place where men overreach one another in the fight for money. But it is not a place in which one can live.

"Years ago, I think, it was possible to have a home in the city. I used to think that a home in Boston might possibly be imagined. But no one can have a home in New York in all that noise and haste.

"Sometimes I am worried by the thought of the effect that life in the city will have on coming

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generations. All this grind and rush and roar of the Subway and the surface cars must have some effect on the children of New-Yorkers. And that effect cannot be good.

“And what effect can it have on our literature? It might produce, I suppose, in the writer’s mind, a sense of the necessity of haste, a passionate desire to get his effect as quickly as possible. But can it give him sharpness of intellect and keenness of æsthetic perception! I’d like to think so, but I can’t. I don’t see how literature can be produced in the city. Literature must have repose, and there is no repose in New York so far as I can see.

“Of course I have no right to speak for other writers. Some people can find repose in the city—I can’t. I hear that people write on the trains, on the omnibus, and in the Subway—I don’t see how they do it!”

“Have you noticed,” I asked, as we left the lane and walked down a grassy slope toward the study, “that the city has not as yet set its mark on our literature?”

“I think,” said John Burroughs, “that much of our modern fiction shows what I may call a metropolitan quality; it seems made up of showy streets and electric light. But I don’t know. I

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don't read much fiction. I turn more to poetry and to meditative essays. Some poets find beauty in the city, and they must, I suppose, find repose there. Richard Watson Gilder spent nearly all his life in a city and reflected the life of the city in his poems. And Edmund Clarence Stedman was thoroughly a poet of the city. I don't think that any of Emerson's poems smack of the city. They smack of the country, and of Emerson's study in the country, his study under the pines, where, as he wrote:

the sacred pine-tree adds
To the leaves her myriads.

“Of the younger poets, John James Piatt has written beautifully of the city. He wrote a very fine poem called ‘The Morning Street,’ which appeared in the *Atlantic Monthly* some years ago. In it he describes vividly the hush of early morning in a great city, when the steps of a solitary traveler echo from the walls of the sleeping houses. I don't suppose Piatt is known to many readers of this generation. He was a friend of Howells, and was the co-author with Howells of *Poems by Two Friends*, published in the early sixties. This was Howells's first venture.”

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We were in the bark-walled study now, seated before the great stone fireplace, in which some logs were blazing. On the stone shelf I saw, among the photographs of Carlyle and Emerson and other friends of my host, a portrait of Whitman.

“Your friend, Walt Whitman,” I said, “got inspiration from the city.”

“Yes,” said John Burroughs, “he got inspiration from the city, but you wouldn’t call his poems city poetry. His way of writing wasn’t metropolitan, you know; you might say that he treated the city by a country method. What he loved about the city was its people—he loved the throngs of men, he loved human associations.

“But he was a born lover of cities, Whitman was. He loved the city in all its phases, mainly because he was such a lover of his kind, of the ‘human critter,’ as he calls him. Whitman spent most of his life in the city, and was more at home there than in the country. He came to Brooklyn when he was a boy, and there he worked in a law-office, and as a printer and on the *Eagle*.

“For a while, I remember, he drove a ’bus up and down Broadway when the driver, who was a friend of his, was sick. That’s where he got

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the stuff he put in *The Funeral of an Old Omnibus-driver*. He put in it all the signs and catchwords of the 'bus-drivers."

John Burroughs pointed his steady old hand at a big framed photograph on the wall. It is an unusual portrait of Walt Whitman, showing him seated, with his hands clasped, with a flaring shirt collar, like a sailor's.

"Whitman," John Burroughs continued, "seems to be appealing more and more to young men. But in the modern Whitmanesque young poets I don't see much to suggest Whitman, except in form. They do clever things, but not elemental things, not things with a cosmic basis. Whitman, with all his commonness and nearness, reached out into the abysmal depths, as his imitators fail to do. I think Robert Frost has been influenced by Whitman. His *North of Boston* is very good; it is genuine realism; it is a faithful, convincing picture of New England farm life. When I first saw the book I didn't think I'd read three pages of it, but I read it all with keen interest. It's absolutely true.

"I used to see Whitman often when he and I were working in Washington. And he came up to see me here. When I was in Washington

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Whitman used to like to come up to our house for Sunday morning breakfast. Mrs. Burroughs makes capital pancakes, and Walt was very fond of them, but he was always late for breakfast. The coffee would boil over, the griddle would smoke, car after car would go jingling by, and no Walt. But a car would stop at last, and Walt would roll off it and saunter up to the door—cheery, vigorous, serene, putting every one in good humor. And how he ate! He radiated health and hopefulness. This is what made his work among the sick soldiers in Washington of such inestimable value. Every one who came into personal relations with him felt his rare, compelling charm.

“Very few young literary men of Whitman’s day accepted him. Stedman did, and the fact is greatly to his credit. Howells and Aldrich were repelled by his bigness. All the Boston poets except Emerson hesitated. Emerson didn’t hesitate—unlike Lowell and Holmes, he kept open house for big ideas.”

I asked Mr. Burroughs what, in his opinion, had brought about the change in the world’s attitude toward Whitman.

“Well,” he replied, looking thoughtfully into

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the radiant depths of the open fire, "when Whitman first appeared we were all subservient to the conventional standards of English literature. We understood and appreciated only the pretty and exact. Whitman came in his working-man's garb, in his shirt sleeves he sauntered into the parlor of literature.

"We resented it. But the young men nowadays are more liberal. More and more Whitman is forcing on them his open-air standards. Science supplemented by the human heart gives us a bigger and freer world than our forefathers knew. And then the European acceptance of Whitman had had its effect. We take our point of view so largely from Europe. And a force like Whitman's must be felt slowly; it's a cumulative thing."

"You believe," I said, "that Whitman is our greatest poet?"

"Oh yes," he replied, "Whitman is the greatest poet America has produced. He is great with the qualities that make Homer and the classic poets great. Emerson is more precious, more intellectual. Whitman and Emerson are our two greatest poets."

While we strolled over the pleasant turf and

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watched a wood-thrush resting in the cool of the evening above her half-built nest among the cherry blossoms, John Burroughs returned to the subject that we had discussed on our way from the station—the city's evil effect on literature.

“Business life,” he said, “is inimical to poetry. To write poetry you must get into an atmosphere utterly different from that of the city. And one of the greatest of all enemies of literature is the newspaper. The style of writing that the newspaper has brought into existence is as far as possible from art and literature. When you are writing for a daily paper, you don't try to say a thing in a poetic or artistic way, but in an efficient way, in a business-like way. There is no appeal to the imagination, no ideality. A newspaper is a noisy thing that goes out into the street and shouts its way into the attention of people.

“If you are going to write poetry you must say to certain phases of the newspapers, ‘Get thee behind me, Satan!’ A poet can't be developing his gossiping faculty and turning everything hot off the griddle. The daily paper is a new institution, and it has come to stay. But it has bad manners, and it is the enemy of all meditation, all privacy, all things that make for great art.

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“It’s the same way with nature and writing about nature. From nature we get not literature, but the raw material for literature. It is very important for us to remember that the bee does not get honey from the flowers; it makes honey from what it gets from the flowers. What it gets from the flowers is nothing but sweet water. The bee gets its sweet water, retires, thinks it over, and by a private process makes it into honey.

“So many nature-writers fail to profit by the example of the bee. They go into the woods and come out again and write about their experience—but they don’t give us honey. They don’t retire and subject what they find in the woods to a private process. They don’t give us honey; they give us just a little sweet water, pretty thoroughly diluted.

“In my own work—if I may mention it in all humbleness—I have tried for years not to give the world just a bare record, but to flavor it, so to speak, with my own personality, as the bee turns the sweet water that it gets into honey by adding its own formic acid.

“If I lived in the city I couldn’t do any writing, unless I succeeded in obliterating the city from my consciousness. But I shouldn’t try to force

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my standards on every one. Other men live in the cities and write—Carlyle did most of his work in London. But he lived a secluded life even in the city, and he had to have his yearly pilgrimage to Scotland.”

It is some years since John Burroughs has written poetry, although all his prose is clearly the work of a poet. And it is safe to say that better known than any of his intimate prose studies of the out-of-door world—better known even than *Wake Robin* and that immortal *A Hunt for the Nightingale* and *In Fresh Fields*—is one of his poems, *Waiting*, the poem that begins:

Serene, I fold my hands and wait,
Nor care for wind, nor tide, nor sea;
I rave no more 'gainst time or fate,
For lo! my own shall come to me.

“I wrote *Waiting*,” he said, “in 1862, when I was reading medicine in the office of a country physician. It was a dingy afternoon, and I was feeling pretty blue. But the thought came to me—I suppose I got it from Goethe or some of the Orientals, probably by way of Emerson—that what belonged to me would come to me in time, if I waited—and if I also hustled. So I waited and I hustled, and my little poem turned out to

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be a prophecy. My own has come to me, as I never expected it to come. The best friends I have were seeking me all the while. There's Henry Ford; he had read all my books, and he came to me—that great-hearted man, the friend of all the birds, and my friend.

“The poem first appeared in the *Knickerbocker Magazine*. That magazine was edited by a Cockney named Kinneha Cornwallis. It ran long enough to print one of Cornwallis's novels, and then it died. I remember that the *Knickerbocker Magazine* never paid me for *Waiting*, and the poem didn't attract any attention until Whittier printed it in his *Songs of Three Centuries*.

“It has been changed and tampered with and had all sorts of things done to it. It was found among the manuscripts of a poet down South after his death, and his literary executor was going to print it in his book. He wrote to me and asked if I could show a date for it earlier than 1882. I said, ‘Yes, 1862!’ and that settled that matter.

“There was a man in Boston that I wanted to kick! He wrote to me and asked if he could print *Waiting* on a card and circulate it among his friends. I told him he could, and sent him

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an autographed copy to make sure he'd get it straight. He sent me a package of the printed cards, and I found that he had added a stanza to it—a religious stanza, all about Heaven's gate! He had left out the second stanza, and added this religious stanza. He was worried because God had been left out of my poem—poor God, ignored by a little atom like me!

“When people ask me where I got the idea in it, I generally say that my parents were old-school Baptists and believed in foreordination, and that's the way that foreordination cropped out in me—it's a sort of transcendental version of foreordination. I think the poem is true—like attracts like; it's the way in which we are constituted, rather than any conscious factor, that insures success. It's that that makes our fortunes, it's that that is the 'tide in the affairs of men' that Shakespeare meant.”

A few rods from John Burroughs's riverside house a brown thrush is building her nest in a cherry-tree. She is a bird of individual ideas, and is thoroughly convinced that paper, not twigs and leaves, forms the proper basis for her work. It is pleasant to think of John Burroughs seated in his study communing with the mem-

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ories of Whitman and Emerson and his other great dead friends. But it is pleasanter to think of him, as I saw him, anxious and intent, his great white beard mingled with the cherry blossoms, as he strolled over to fix the paper base of the thrush's nest so that the wind could not destroy it.

"EVASIVE IDEALISM" IN LITERATURE

ELLEN GLASGOW

“EVASIVE IDEALISM” IN LITERATURE

ELLEN GLASGOW

WHAT is the matter with American literature? There are many answers that might be made to this often-asked question. “Nothing” might be one answer. “Commercialism” might be another. But the answer given by Ellen Glasgow, whose latest successful novel of American manners and morals is *Life and Gabriella*, is “evasive idealism.”

I found the young woman who has found in our Southern States themes for sympathetic realism rather than picturesque romance temporarily resident, inappropriately enough, in a hotel not far from Broadway and Forty-second Street. And I found her to be a woman of many ideas and strong convictions. One strongly felt and forcibly expressed conviction was that the “evasive idealism” which is evident in so much of our

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popular fiction is in reality the chief blemish on the American character, manifesting its baleful influence in our political, social, and economic life. Miss Glasgow first used the term "evasive idealism" in an effort to explain why contemporary English novels are better than contemporary American novels.

"Certainly," she said, "the novels written by John Galsworthy and the other English novelists of the new generation are better than anything that we are producing in the United States at the present time. And I think that the reason for this is that in America we demand from our writers, as we demand from our politicians, and in general from those who theoretically are our men of light and leading, an evasive idealism instead of a straightforward facing of realities. In England the demand is for a direct and sincere interpretation of life, and that is what the novelists of England, especially the younger novelists, are making. But what the American public seems to desire is the cheapest sort of sham optimism. And apparently our writers—a great many of them—are ready and eager to meet this demand.

"You know the sort of book which takes best in this country. It is the sort of book in which

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there is not from beginning to end a single attempt to portray a genuine human being. Instead there are a number of picturesque and attractive lay figures, and one of them is made to develop a whimsical, sentimental, and maudlinly optimistic philosophy of life.

“That is what the people want—a sugary philosophy, utterly without any basis in logic or human experience. They want the cheapest sort of false optimism, and they want it to be uttered by a picturesque, whimsical character, in humorous dialect. Books made according to this receipt sell by the hundreds of thousands.

“I don’t know which is the more tragic, the fact that a desire for this sort of literary pabulum exists, or the fact that there are so many writers willing to satisfy that desire. But I do know that the widespread enthusiasm for this sort of writing is the reason for the inferiority of our novels to those of England. And, furthermore, I think that this evasive idealism, this preference for a pretty sham instead of the truth, is evident not only in literature, but in every phase of American life.

“Look at our politics! We tolerate corruption; graft goes on undisturbed, except for some spo-

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radic attacks of conscience on the part of various communities. The ugliness of sin is there, but we prefer not to look at it. Instead of facing the evil and attacking it manfully we go after any sort of a false god that will detract our attention from our shame. Just as in literature we want the books which deal not with life as it is, but with life as it might be imagined to be lived, so in politics we want to face not hard and unpleasant facts, but agreeable illusions.

“Nevertheless,” said Miss Glasgow, “I think that in literature there are signs of a movement away from this evasive idealism. It is much more evident in England than in America, but I think that in the course of time it will reach us, too. We shall cease to be ‘slaves of words,’ as Sophocles said, and learn that the novelist’s duty is to understand and interpret life. And when our novelists and our readers of novels appreciate the advisability of this attitude, then will the social and political life of the United States be more wholesome than it has been for many a year. The new movement in the novel is away from sentimental optimism and toward an optimism that is genuine and robust.”

“Then a novel may be at once optimistic and

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realistic?” I said. “That is not in accord with the generally received ideas of realism.”

“It is true of the work of the great realists,” answered Miss Glasgow. “True realism is optimistic, without being sentimental.”

“What realists have been optimistic?” I asked.

“Well,” said Miss Glasgow, “Henry Fielding, one of the first and greatest of English realists, surely was an optimist. And there was Charles Dickens—often, it is true, he was sentimental, but at his best he was a robust optimist.

“But the greatest modern example of the robust optimistic realist, absolutely free from sentimentality, is George Meredith. Galsworthy, who surely is a realist, is optimistic in such works as *The Freelands* and *The Patricians*. And Meredith is always realistic and always optimistic.

“The optimism I mean, the optimism which is a distinguishing characteristic of George Meredith’s works, does not come from an evasion of facts, but from a recognition of them. The constructive novelist, the novelist who really interprets life, never ignores any of the facts of life. Instead, he accepts them and builds upon them. And he perceives the power of the will to control destiny; he knows that life is not what you get

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out of it, but what you put into it. This is what the younger English novelists know and what our novelists must learn. And it is their growing recognition of this spirit that makes me feel that the tendency of modern literature is toward democracy."

"What is the connection between democracy and the tendency you have described?" I asked.

"To me," Miss Glasgow answered, "true democracy consists chiefly in the general recognition of the truth that will create destiny. Democracy does not consist in the belief that all men are born free and equal or in the desire that they shall be born free and equal. It consists in the knowledge that all people should possess an opportunity to use their will to control—to create—destiny, and that they should know that they have this opportunity. They must be educated to the use of the will, and they must be taught that character can create destiny.

"Of course, environment inevitably has its effect on the character, and, therefore, on will, and, therefore, on destiny. You can so oppress and depress the body that the will has no chance. True democracy provides for all equal opportunities for the exercise of will. If you hang a man,

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you can't ask him to exercise his will. But if you give him a chance to live—which is the democratic thing to do—then you put before him an opportunity to exercise his will.”

“But what are the manifestations of this new democratic spirit?” I asked. “Is not the war, which is surely the greatest event of our time, an anti-democratic thing?”

“The war is not anti-democratic,” Miss Glasgow replied, “any more than it is anti-autocratic. Or rather, I may say it is both anti-democratic and anti-autocratic. It is a conflict of principles, a deadly struggle between democracy and imperialism. It is a fight for the new spirit of democracy against the old evil order of things.

“Of course, I do not mean that the democracy of France and England is perfect. But with all its imperfections it is nearer true democracy than is the spirit of Germany. We should not expect the democracy of our country to be perfect. The time has not come for that. ‘Man is not man as yet,’ as Browning said in *Paracelsus*.

“The war is turning people away from the false standards in art and letters which they served so long. The highly artificial romantic novel and drama are impossible in Europe to-day.

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The war has made that sort of thing absolutely absurd. And America must be affected by this just as every other nation in the world is affected. To our novelists and to all of us must come a sense of the serious importance of actual life, instead of a sense of the beauty of romantic illusions. There are many indications of this tendency in our contemporary literature. For instance, in poetry we have the Spoon River Anthology—surely a sign of the return of the poet to real life. But the greatest poets, like the greatest novelists, have always been passionately interested in real life. Walt Whitman and Robert Browning always were realists and always were optimistic. Whitman was a most exultant optimist; he was optimistic even about dying.

“Among recent books of verse I have been much impressed by Masefield’s *Good Friday*. There is a work which is both august and sympathetic; Mr. Masefield’s treatment of his theme is realistic, yet thoroughly reverent. There is one line in it which I think I never shall forget. It is, ‘The men who suffer most endure the least.’

“*Good Friday* is a sign of literature’s strong tendency toward reality. It seems to me to be a phase of the general breaking down of the bar-

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riers between the nations, the classes, and the sexes. But this breaking down of barriers is something that most of our novelists have been ignoring. Mary Watts has recognized it, but she is one of the very few American novelists to do so.”

“But this sort of consciousness is not generally considered to be a characteristic of the realistic novelist,” I said. And I mentioned to Miss Glasgow a certain conspicuous American novelist whose books are very long, very dull, and distinguished only by their author’s obsession with sex. He, I said, was the man of whom most people would think first when the word realist was spoken.

“Of course,” said Miss Glasgow, “we must distinguish between a realist and a vulgarian, and I do not see how a writer who is absolutely without humor can justly be called a realist. Consider the great realists—Jane Austen, Henry Fielding, Anthony Trollope, George Meredith—they all had humor. What our novelists need chiefly are more humor and a more serious attitude toward life. If our novelists are titanic enough, they will have a serious attitude toward life, and if they stand far enough off they will have humor.

“I hope,” Miss Glasgow added, “that America will produce better literature after the war. I

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hope that a change for the better will be evident in all branches of literary endeavor. We have to-day many novelists who start out with the serious purpose of interpreting life. But they don't interpret it. They find that it is easier to give the people what they want than to interpret life. Therefore this change in the character of our novels must come after the people themselves are awakened to a sense of the importance of real life, instead of life sentimentally and deceptively portrayed.

"I think that our novels to-day are better than they were twenty-five years ago. Of course, we have no Hawthorne to-day, but the general average of stories is better than it was. We have so many accomplished writers of short stories. There is Katharine Fullerton Gerould. What an admirable artist she is! Mary E. Wilkins has written some splendid interpretations of New England life, and Miss Jewett reflected the mind and soul of a part of our country."

*“CHOCOLATE FUDGE” IN THE
MAGAZINES*

FANNIE HURST

“CHOCOLATE FUDGE” IN THE MAGAZINES

FANNIE HURST

ONLY a few years ago Fannie Hurst's name was unknown to most readers. But in a surprisingly short time Miss Hurst's short stories, especially her sympathetic and poignantly realistic studies of the life of the Jewish citizens of New York, have earned for her popular as well as critical approval.

Fannie Hurst's fame has been won almost entirely through the most widely circulated weekly and monthly magazines. And yet when I talked to this energetic young woman the other morning in her studio in Carnegie Hall, I found her attitude toward the magazines anything but friendly. She accused them of printing what she called “chocolate-fudge” fiction. And she said it in a way which indicated that chocolate fudge is not her favorite dish.

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"I do not feel," she said, "that the American magazine is exerting itself toward influencing our fiction for the better. In most cases it is content to pander to the untutored public taste instead of attempting anything constructive.

"The magazine public is, after all, open to conviction. But phlegm and commercialism on the part of most of our magazines lead them to give the public what it wants rather than what is good for it.

"If chocolate-fudge fiction will sell the magazine, give 'em chocolate fudge!' say editors and publishers. Small wonder that American fiction-readers continue bilious in their demands. Authors, meanwhile, who like sweet butter on their bread—it is amazing how many do—continue to postpone that Big Idea, and American fiction pauses by the wayside."

"What is the remedy for this condition, Miss Hurst?" I asked. "Would matters be better if the writers did not have to comply with the demands of the magazines—if they had some other means of making a living than writing?"

Miss Hurst did not answer at once. At length she said, thoughtfully:

"It would seem that to escape this almost in-

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evitable overlapping of bread and sweet butter the writer of short stories should not depend upon the sale of his work for a living, but should endeavor to provide himself with some other source of income.

“Theoretically, at least, such a condition would eliminate the pot-boilers and safeguard the serious worker from the possibility of ‘misshaping’ his art to meet a commercial condition.

“I say theoretically because from my own point of view I cannot conceive of short-story writing as an avocation. The gentle art of short fiction consumes just about six hours of my day at the rate of from twenty to twenty-five days on a story of from eight to ten thousand words. And since I work best from 9 A.M. to 4 P.M., I can think of no remunerative occupation outside those hours except cabaret work or night clerking.”

“What about present-day relationship between American publishers and authors?” I asked. “Do you think they are all they should be?”

“American publishers and authors,” Miss Hurst replied, “to-day seem to be working somewhat at cross-purposes, owing partially, I think, to the great commercial significance that has become attached to the various rights, such as motion-

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picture, serial, dramatic, book, etc., and which are to be reckoned with in the sale of fiction.

“There is little doubt that authors have suffered at the hands of publishers on these various scores, oftener than not the publisher and not the author reaping the benefits accruing from the author’s ignorance of conditions or lack of foresight.

“The Authors’ League has been formed to remedy just that evil—and it was a crying one.

“On the other hand, it is certain that fiction-writers are better paid to-day than ever in the history of literature, and if a man is writing a seventy-five-dollar story there is a pretty good reason why.

“I feel a great deal of hesitancy about the present proposed affiliation of authors with labor. There is so much to be said on both sides!

“If the publisher represents capital and the author labor, my sympathies immediately veer me toward labor. But do they? That same question has recently been thrashed out by the actors, and they have gone over to labor. Scores of our most prominent American authors are of that same persuasion.

“I cannot help but feel that for publisher and

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author to assume the relationship of employer and employee is a dangerous step. All forms of labor do not come under the same head. And I am the last to say that writing is not hard labor. But Cellini could hardly have allied himself with an iron-workers' guild. All men are mammals, but not all mammals are men!

“It seems doubly unfortunate, with the Authors' League in existence to direct and safeguard the financial destiny of the author, to take a step which immediately places the author and publisher on the same basis of relationship that exists between hod-carrier and contractor.

“As a matter of fact, I am almost wont to question the traditional lack of business acumen in authors. On the contrary, almost every successful author of my acquaintance not only is pretty well able to take care of himself, but owns a motor-car and a safety-deposit box at the same time. And I find the not-so-successful authors prodding pretty faithfully to get their prices up.

“The Authors' League is a great institution and fills a great need. It was formed for just the purpose that seems to be prompting authors to unionize—to instruct authors in their rights and protect them against infringements.

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“Why unionize? Next, an author will find himself obliged to lay aside his pen when the whistle blows, and publishers will be finding themselves obliged to deal in open-shop literature.”

“And what effect are the moving pictures going to have on fiction?” I asked. “Will it be good or bad?”

“Up to the present,” Miss Hurst replied, “moving pictures have, in my opinion, been little else than a destructive force where American fiction is concerned. Picturized fiction is on a cheap and sensational level. Even classics and standardized fiction are ruthlessly defamed by tawdry presentation. With the mechanics of the motion picture so advanced, it is unfortunate that the photoplay itself is not keeping pace with that advancement.

“Motion pictures are in the hands of laymen, and they show it. The scenario-writers, so-called ‘staff writers,’ have sprung up overnight, so to speak, and, from what I understand, when authors venture into the field they are at the mercy of the moving-picture director.

“Mrs. Frances Hodgson Burnett could not endure to sit through the picture presentation of *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, so mutilated was it.

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“Of course, scenario-writing is a new art, and this interesting form of expression has hardly emerged from its infancy. Except perhaps in such great spectacles as ‘The Birth of a Nation,’ where, after all, the play is not the thing.”

I asked Miss Hurst if she agreed with those who believe that Edgar Allan Poe’s short stories have never been surpassed. I found that she did not.

“I should say,” she said, “that since Poe’s time we have had masters of the short story who have equaled him. Poe is, of course, the legitimate father of the American short story, and, coupled with that fact, was possessed of that kind of self-consciousness which enabled him to formulate a law of composition which has not been without its influence upon our subsequent short fiction.

“But in American letters there is little doubt that in the last one hundred years the short story has made more progress than any other literary type. We are becoming not only proficient, but pre-eminent in the short story. I can think off-hand of quite a group of writers, each of whom has contributed short-story classics to our literature.

“There are Robert Louis Stevenson, Henry

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James (if we may claim him), Bret Harte, Mark Twain, Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, O. Henry, Richard Harding Davis, Jack London, and Booth Tarkington. And I am sure that there are various others whose names do not occur to me at this moment."

"You mentioned O. Henry," I said. "Then you do not share Katharine Fullerton Gerould's belief that O. Henry's influence on modern fiction is bad?"

"I decidedly disagree," said Miss Hurst, with considerable firmness, "with the statement that O. Henry wrote incidents rather than short stories, and is a pernicious influence in modern letters. That his structural form is more than anecdotal can be shown by an analysis of almost any of his plots.

"But it seems pedantic to criticize O. Henry on the score of structure. Admitting that the substance of his writings does rest on frail framework, even sometimes upon the trick, he built with Gothic skill and with no obvious pillars of support.

"Corot was none the less a landscape artist because he removed that particular brown tree from that particular green slope. O. Henry's

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facetiousness and, if you will, his frail structures, are no more to be reckoned with than, for instance, the extravagance of plot and the morbid formality we find in Poe.

‘‘The smiting word and the polished phrase he quite frankly subordinated to the laugh, or the tear with a snuffle. Just as soon call red woolen underwear pernicious!

‘‘The Henry James school has put a superfinish upon literature which, it is true, gives the same satisfying sense of wholeness that we get from a Greek urn. But, after all, chastity is not the first and last requisite. O. Henry loved to laugh with life! It was not in him to regard it with a Mona Lisa smile.’’

Miss Hurst has confined her attention so closely to American metropolitan life that I thought it would be interesting to have her opinion as to the truth of the remark, attributed to William Dean Howells, that American literature is merely a phase of English literature. In reply to my question she said:

‘‘I agree with Mr. Howells that American literature up to now has been rather a phase of English literature. His own graceful art is an example of cousinship. American literature prob-

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ably will continue to be an effort until our American melting-pot ceases boiling.

“*David Copperfield* and *Vanity Fair* come from a people whose lineage goes back by century-plants and not by Mayflowers. Theodore Dreiser and Ernest Poole, sometimes more or less inarticulately, are preparing us for the great American novel. When we reach a proper consistency the boiling is bound to cease, and, just as inevitably, the epic novel must come.”

THE NEW SPIRIT IN POETRY

AMY LOWELL

THE NEW SPIRIT IN POETRY

AMY LOWELL

MISS AMY LOWELL, America's chief advocate and practitioner of the new poetry, would wear, I supposed, a gown by Bakst, with many Oriental jewels. And incense would be burning in a golden basin. And Miss Lowell would say that the art of poetry was discovered in 1916.

But there is nothing exotic or artificial about Miss Lowell's appearance and surroundings. Nor did the author of *Sword Blades and Poppy Seed* express, when I talked to her the other day, any of the extravagant opinions which conservative critics attribute to the *vers libristes*. Miss Lowell talked with the practicality which is of New England and the serenity which is of Boston; she was positive, but not narrowly dogmatic; she is keenly appreciative of contemporary poetry, but she has the fullest sense of the value of

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the great heritage of poetical tradition that has come down to us through the ages.

There is so much careless talk of *imagisme*, *vers libre*, and the new poetry in general that I thought it advisable to begin our talk by asking for a definition or a description of the new poetry. In reply to my question Miss Lowell said:

“The thing that makes me feel sure that there is a future in the new poetry is the fact that those who write it follow so many different lines of thought. The new poetry is so large a subject that it can scarcely be covered by one definition. It seems to me that there are four definite sorts of new poetry, which I will attempt to describe.

“One branch of the new poetry may be called the realistic school. This branch is descended partly from Whitman and partly from the prose-writers of France and England. The leading exponents of it are Robert Frost and Edgar Lee Masters. These two poets are different from each other, but they both are realists, they march under the same banner.

“Another branch of the new poetry consists of the poets whose work shows a mixture of the highly imaginative and the realistic. Their thought verges on the purely imaginative, but is

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corrected by a scientific attitude of mind. I suppose that this particular movement in English poetry may be said to have started with Coleridge, but in England the movement hardly attained its due proportions. Half of literary England followed Wordsworth, half followed Byron. It is in America that we find the greatest disciple of Coleridge in the person of Edgar Allan Poe. The force of the movement then went back to France, where it showed clearly in Mallarmê and the later symbolists. To-day we see this tendency somewhat popularized in Vachell Lindsay, although perhaps he does not know it. And if I may be so bold as to mention myself, I should say that I in common with most other imagists belong to this branch, that I am at once a fantasist and a realist.

“Thirdly, we have the lyrico-imaginative type of poet. Of this branch the best example that I can call to mind is John Gould Fletcher. The fourth group of the new poets consists of those who are descended straight from Matthew Arnold. They show the Wordsworth influence corrected by experience and education. Browning is in their line of descent. Characteristics of their work are high seriousness, astringency, and a certain pruning down of poetry so that redundancy is

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absolutely avoided. Of this type the most striking example is Edwin Arlington Robinson."

"Miss Lowell," I said, "the opponents of the new poetry generally attack it chiefly on account of its form—or rather, on account of its formlessness. And yet what you have said has to do only with the idea itself. You have said nothing about the way in which the idea is expressed."

"There is no special form which is characteristic of the new poetry," said Miss Lowell, "and of course 'formlessness' is a word which is applied to it only by the ignorant. The new poetry is in every form. Edgar Lee Masters has written in *vers libre* and in regular rhythm. Robert Frost writes in blank verse. Vachell Lindsay writes in varied rhyme schemes. I write in both the regular meters and the newer forms, such as *vers libre* and 'polyphonic prose.'

"It is a mistake to suppose, as many conservative critics do, that modern poetry is a matter of *vers libre*. *Vers libre* is not new, but it is valuable to give vividness when vividness is desired. *Vers libre* is a difficult thing to write well, and a very easy thing to write badly. This particular branch of the new poetry movement has been imitated so extensively that it has brought the whole movement into disrepute in the eyes of casual observers.

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But we must remember that no movement is to be judged by its obscure imitators. A movement must be judged by the few people at its head who make the trend. There cannot be many of them. In the history of the world there are only a few supreme artists, only a small number of great artists, only a limited number of good artists. And to suppose that we in America at this particular moment can be possessed of many artists worthy of consideration is ridiculous.

“Undoubtedly the fact that a great number of people are engaged to-day in producing poetry is a great stimulus and helps to create a proper atmosphere for those men whose work may live. For it is a curious fact that the artistic names that have come down to us are those of men who have lived in the so-called great artistic periods, when many other men were working at the same thing.”

I asked Miss Lowell to tell something of this *vers libre* which is so much discussed and so little understood. She said:

“*Vers libre* is based upon rhythm. Its definition is ‘A verse form based upon cadence rather than upon exact meter.’ It is a little difficult to define cadence when dealing with poetry. I might call it the sense of balance.

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“The unit of *vers libre* is the strophe, not the line or the foot, as in regular meter. The strophe is a group of words which round themselves satisfactorily to the ear. In short poems this complete rounding may take place only at the end, making the poem a unit of a single movement, the lines serving only to give the slight up-and-down effect necessary to the voice when the poem is read aloud.

“In longer poems the strophe may be a group of lines. Poetry being a spoken and not a written art, those not well versed in the various poetic forms will find it simpler to read *vers libre* poems aloud, rather than to try to get their rhythm from the printed page. For people who are used only to the exact meters, the printed arrangement of a *vers libre* poem is a confusing process. To a certain extent cadence is dependent upon quantity—long and short syllables being of peculiar importance. Words hurried over in reading are balanced by words on which the reader pauses. Remember, also, that *vers libre* can be either rhymed or unrhymed.”

“One objection,” I said, “that many critics bring up against unrhymed poetry is that it cannot be remembered.”

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“I cannot see that that is of the slightest importance,” Miss Lowell replied. “The music that we whistle when we come out of the theater is not the greatest music we have heard.

“Zaccheus he
Did climb a tree
His Lord to see

is easily remembered. But I refuse to think that it is great poetry.

“The enemies of *vers libre*,” she continued, “say that *vers libre* is in no respect different from oratory. Now, there is a difference between the cadence of *vers libre* and the cadence of oratory. Lincoln’s Gettysburg address is not *vers libre*, it is rhythmical prose. At the prose end of cadence is rhythmical prose; at the verse end is *vers libre*. The difference is in the kind of cadence.

“Recently a writer in *The Nation* took some of Meredith’s prose and made it into *vers libre* poems which any poet would have been glad to write. Then he took some of my poems and turned them into prose, with a result which he was kind enough to call beautiful. He then pertinently asked what was the difference.

“I might answer that there is no difference.

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Typography is not relevant to the discussion. Whether a thing is written as prose or as verse is immaterial. But if we would see the advantage which Meredith's imagination enjoyed in the freer forms of expression, we need only compare these lyrical passages from his prose works with his own metrical poetry."

I asked Miss Lowell about the charge that the new poets are lacking in reverence for the great poets of the past. She believes that the charge is unfounded. Nevertheless, she believes that the new poets do well to take the New England group of writers less seriously than conservative critics would have them take them.

"America has produced only two great poets, Whitman and Poe," said Miss Lowell. "The rest of the early American poets were cultivated gentlemen, but they were more exactly English provincial poets than American poets, and they were decidedly inferior to the parent stock. The men of the New England group, with the single exception of Emerson, were cultivated gentlemen with a taste for literature—they never rose above that level.

"No one can judge his contemporaries. We cannot say with certainty that the poets of this

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generation are better than their predecessors. But surely we can see that the new poets have more originality, more of the stuff out of which poetry is made, than their predecessors had, aside from the two great exceptions that I have mentioned."

"What is the thing that American poetry chiefly needs?" I asked.

"Well," said Miss Lowell, "I wish that there were a great many changes in our attitude toward literature. I wish that no man could expect to make a living by writing. I wish that the magazines did not pay for contributions—few of them do in France, you know. And I wish that the newspapers did not try to review books. But the thing that we chiefly need is informed and authoritative criticism.

"We have very few critics, we have practically none who are writing separate books on contemporary verse. When I was writing my *French Poets* I read twenty or thirty books on contemporary French poetry, serious books, written by critics who make a specialty of the poetry of their own day.

"We have nothing like this in America. The men who write critical books write of the litera-

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ture of a hundred years ago. No critical mind is bent toward contemporary verse. There are a few newspaper critics who pay serious attention to contemporary verse—William Stanley Braithwaite, O. W. Firkins, and Louis Untermeyer, for example—but there are only a few of them.

“What is to be desired is for some one to be as interested in criticism as the poets are in poetry. It was the regularity of Sainte-Beuve’s ‘*Causeries du Lundi*’ that gave it its weight. What we want is a critic like that, who is neither an old man despairing of a better job nor a young man using his newspaper work as a stepping-stone to something higher. Of course, brilliant criticisms of poetry appear from time to time, but what we need is criticism as an institution.

“After all,” said Miss Lowell, in conclusion, “there are only two kinds of poetry, good poetry and bad poetry. The form of poetry is a matter of individual idiosyncrasy. It is only the very young and the very old, the very inexperienced or the numbed, who say, ‘This is the only way in which poetry shall be written!’”

A NEW DEFINITION OF POETRY

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

A NEW DEFINITION OF POETRY

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

AT no time in the history of literature have the critics been able to agree upon a definition of poetry. And the recent popularity of *vers libre* and *imagisme* has made the definer's task harder than ever before. Is rhyme essential to poetry? Is rhythm essential to poetry? Can a mere reflection of life justly be called poetry, or must imagination be present?

I put some of these questions to Edwin Arlington Robinson, who wrote *Captain Craig*, *The Children of the Night*, *The Town Down the River*, *The Man Against the Sky* and *Merlin: A Poem*. And this man, whom William Stanley Braithwaite and other authoritative critics have called the foremost of American poets, this student of life, who was revealing the mysterious poetry of humanity many years before Edgar Lee Masters discovered to the world the vexed spirits that haunt Spoon River,

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rewarded my questioning with a new definition of poetry. He said:

“Poetry is a language that tells us, through a more or less emotional reaction, something that cannot be said.

“All real poetry, great or small, does this,” he added. “And it seems to me that poetry has two characteristics. One is that it is, after all, undefinable. The other is that it is eventually unmistakable.”

“‘Eventually’!” I said. “Then you think that poetry is not always appreciated in the lifetime of its maker?”

Mr. Robinson smiled whimsically. “I never use words enough,” he said. “It is not unmistakable as soon as it is published, but sooner or later it is unmistakable.

“And in the poet’s lifetime there are always some people who will understand and appreciate his work. I really think that it is impossible for a real poet permanently to escape appreciation. And I can’t imagine anything sillier for a man to do than to worry about poetry that has once been decently published. The rest is in the hands of Time, and Time has more than often a way of making a pretty thorough job of it.”

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"But why is it," I asked, "that a great poet so often is without honor in his own generation, where mediocrity is immediately famous?"

"It's hard to say," said Mr. Robinson, thoughtfully regarding the glowing end of his cigar. "Many causes prevent poetry from being correctly appraised in its own time. Any poetry that is marked by violence, that is conspicuous in color, that is sensationally odd, makes an immediate appeal. On the other hand, poetry that is not noticeably eccentric sometimes fails for years to attract any attention.

"I think that this is why so many of Kipling's worst poems are greatly overpraised, while some of his best poems are not appreciated. *Gunga Din*, which is, of course, a good thing in its way, has been praised far more than it deserves, because of its oddity. And the poem beginning 'There's a whisper down the field' has never been properly appreciated. It's one of the very best of Kipling's poems, although it is marred by a few lapses of taste. One of his greatest poems, by the way, *The Children of the Zodiac*, happens to be in prose.

"But I am always revising my opinion of Kipling. I have changed my mind about him so

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often that I have no confidence in my critical judgment. That is one of the reasons why I do not like to criticise my American contemporaries."

"Do you think," I asked, "that this tendency to pay attention chiefly to the more sensational poets is as characteristic of our generation as of those that came before?"

"I think it applies particularly to our own time," he replied. "More than ever before oddity and violence are bringing into prominence poets who have little besides these two qualities to offer the world, and some who have much more. It may seem very strange to you, but I think that a great modern instance of this tendency is the case of Robert Browning. The eccentricities of Browning's method are the things that first turned popular attention upon him, but the startling quality in Browning made more sensation in his own time than it can ever make again. I say this in spite of the fact that Browning and Wordsworth are taken as the classic examples of slow recognition. Wordsworth, you know, had no respect for the judgment of youth. It may have been sour grapes, but I am inclined to think that there was a great deal of truth in his opinion.

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“I think it is safe to say that all real poetry is going to give at some time or other a suggestion of finality. In real poetry you find that something has been said, and yet you find also about it a sort of nimbus of what can't be said.

“This nimbus may be there—I wouldn't say that it isn't there—and yet I can't find it in much of the self-conscious experimenting that is going on nowadays in the name of poetry.

“I can't get over the impression,” Mr. Robinson went on, with a meditative frown, “that these post-impressionists in painting and most of the *vers libristes* in poetry are trying to find some sort of short cut to artistic success. I know that many of the new writers insist that it is harder to write good *vers libre* than to write good rhymed poetry. And judging from some of their results, I am inclined to agree with them.”

I asked Mr. Robinson if he believed that the evident increase in interest in poetry, shown by the large sales of the work of Robert Frost and Edgar Lee Masters and Rupert Brooke, indicated a real renaissance of poetry.

“I think that it indicates a real renaissance of poetry,” he replied. “I am sufficiently child-like and hopeful to find it very encouraging.”

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“Do you think,” I asked, “that the poetry that is written in America to-day is better than that written a generation ago?”

“I should hardly venture to say that,” said Mr. Robinson. “For one thing, we have no Emerson. Emerson is the greatest poet who ever wrote in America. Passages scattered here and there in his work surely are the greatest of American poetry. In fact, I think that there are lines and sentences in Emerson’s poetry that are as great as anything anywhere.”

I asked Mr. Robinson whether he thought the modern English poets were doing better work than their American contemporaries. At first he was unwilling to express an opinion on this subject, repeating his statement that he mistrusted his own critical judgment. But he said:

“Within his limits, I believe that A. E. Housman is the most authentic poet now writing in England. But, of course, his limits are very sharply drawn. I don’t think that any one who knows anything about poetry will ever think of questioning the inspiration of *A Shropshire Lad*.”

“Would you make a similar comment on any other poetry of our time?” I asked.

“Well,” said Mr. Robinson, reflectively, “I

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think that no one will question the inspiration of some of Kipling's poems, of parts of John Masefield's *Dauber*, and some of the long lyrics of Alfred Noyes. But I do not think that either of these poets gives the impression of finality which A.E.Housman gives. But the way in which I have shifted my opinion about some of Rudyard Kipling's poems, and most of Swinburne's, makes me think that Wordsworth was very largely right in his attitude toward the judgment of youth. But where my opinions have shifted, I think now that I always had misgivings. I fancy that youth always has misgivings in regard to what is later to be modified or repudiated."

Then I asked Mr. Robinson if he thought that the war had anything to do with the renascence of poetry.

"I can't see any connection," he replied. "The only effect on poetry that the war has had, so far as I know, is to produce those five sonnets by Rupert Brooke. I can't see that it has caused any poetical event. And there's no use prophesying what the war will or will not do to poetry, because no one knows anything about it. The Civil War seems to have had little effect on poetry except to produce Julia Ward Howe's *Battle Hymn*

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of the Republic, Whitman's poems on the death of Lincoln, and Lowell's 'Ode.'"

"Mr. Robinson," I said, "there has been much discussion recently about the rewards of poetry, and Miss Amy Lowell has said that no poet ought to be expected to make a living by writing. What do you think about it?"

"Should a poet be able to make a living out of poetry?" said Mr. Robinson. "Generally speaking, it is not possible for a poet to make a decent living by his work. In most cases it would be bad for his creative faculties for a poet to make as much money as a successful novelist makes. Fortunately, there is no danger of that. Now, assuming that a poet has enough money to live on, the most important thing for him to have is an audience. I mean that the best poetry is likely to be written when poetry is in the air. If a poet with no obligations and responsibilities except to stay alive can't live on a thousand dollars a year (I don't undertake to say just how he is going to get it), he'd better go into some other business."

"Then you don't think," I said, "that literature has lost through the poverty of poets?"

"I certainly do believe that literature has lost through the poverty of poets," said Mr. Robin-

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son. "I don't believe in poverty. I never did. I think it is good for a poet to be bumped and knocked around when he is young, but all the difficulties that are put in his way after he gets to be twenty-five or thirty are certain to take something out of his work. I don't see how they can do anything else.

"Some time ago you asked me," said Mr. Robinson, "how I accounted for our difficulty in making a correct estimate of the poetry of one's own time. The question is a difficult one. I don't even say that it has an answer. But the solution of the thing seems to me to be related to what I said about the quality of finality that seems to exist in all real poetry. Finality seems always to have had a way of not obtruding itself to any great extent."

LET POETRY BE FREE

JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

LET POETRY BE FREE

JOSEPHINE PRESTON PEABODY

MRS. LIONEL MARKS—or Josephine Preston Peabody, to call her by the name which she has made famous—is a poet whose tendency has always been toward democracy. From *The Singing Leaves*, her first book of lyrics, to *The Piper* (the dramatic poem which received the Stratford-on-Avon prize in 1910), and *The Wolf of Gubbio*, the poetic representation of events in St. Francis's life in her latest published book, she has chosen for her theme not fantastic and rare aspects of nature, nor the new answers of her own emotions, but things that are common to all normal mankind—such as love and religion. Also, without seeming to preach, she is always expressing her love for Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, and although she never dwells upon the overworked term, she is as devoted an adherent of the brotherhood of man as was William Morris.

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Therefore I was eager to learn whether or not she held the opinion—often expressed during the past months—that poetry is becoming more democratic, less an art practised and appreciated by the chosen few. Also I wanted to know if she saw signs of this democratization of poetry in the development of free verse, or *vers libre*, as those who write it prefer to say, in the apparently growing tendency of poets to give up the use of rhyme and rhythm.

“Certainly, poetry is steadily growing more democratic,” said Mrs. Marks. “More people are writing poetry to-day than fifty years ago, and the appreciation of poetry is more general. Most poets of genuine calling are writing now with the world in mind as an audience, not merely for the entertainment of a little literary cult.

“But I do not think that the *vers libre* fad has any connection with this tendency, or with the development of poetry at all. Indeed, I do not think that the cult is growing; we hear more of it in the United States than we did a year or two ago, but that is chiefly because London and Paris have outworn its novelty, so the *vers libristes* concentrate their energies on Chicago and New York.

“I love some ‘free verse.’ Certainly, there may

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be times when a poet finds he can express his idea or his emotion better without rhyme and rhythm than with them. But verse that is ostentatiously free—free verse that obviously has been made deliberately—that is a highly artificial sort of writing, bears no more relation to literature than does an acrostic. Neither the themes nor the methods of those who call themselves *vers libristes* are democratic; they are, in the worst sense of the word, the sense which came into use at the time of the French Revolution, aristocratic.

“The canon of the *vers libristes* is essentially aristocratic. They contend, absurdly enough, that all traditional forms of rhyme and rhythm constitute a sort of bondage, and therefore they arbitrarily rule them out. Not for them are the fetters that bound Shelley’s spirit to the earth! Also they arbitrarily rule out what they call, with their fondness for labels, the ‘sociological note,’ ‘didacticism,’ ‘meanings’—any ideas or emotions, in fact, that may be called communal or democratic.

“My own canon is that all themes are fit for poetry and that all methods must justify themselves. If I may be permitted to make a clumsy wooden-toy apothegm I would say that poetry

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is rhythmic without and within. If we turn Carlyle's sometimes cloudy prose inside out we find that it has a silver lining of poetry.

"Neither can I understand why the *vers libristes* believe that their sort of writing is new. Leopardi wrote what would be called good *imagisme*, although the *imagistes* do not seem to be aware of the fact, and the theory that rhyme is undesirable in poetry has appeared sporadically time and again in the history of poetry. When Sir Philip Sidney was alive there were pedants who argued against the use of rhyme, and some of them confuted their own arguments by writing charming lyrics in the traditional manner. By dint of reading the fine eye-cracking print in the Globe Edition of Spenser I found that the author of the *Faerie Queen* at one time took seriously Gabriel Harvey's arguments against rhyme and made an unbelievably frightful experiment in rhymeless verse—as bad as the parodists of our band-wagon.

"The other day I asked some one in the Greek department of Harvard how to read a fragment of Sappho's that I wanted to teach my children to say. He said that no one nowadays could know how certain of Sappho's poems really should be read, because the music for them had been

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lost, and they were all true lyrics, meant to be sung and sung by Sappho to music of her own making. So you see that poets who avowedly make verses that can appeal only to the eye, successions of images, in which the position of the words on the page is of great importance, believe that they are the successors of poets whose work was meant not to be read, but to be sung, whose verses fitted the regular measure of music.

“As I said before,” said Mrs. Marks, smiling, “I have no objection to free verse when it is a spontaneous expression. But I do object to free verse when it is organized into a cult that denies other freedoms to other poets! And I object to the bigotry of some of the people who are trying to impose free verse upon an uninterested world.

“And also I object to the unfairness of some of the advocates of free verse. When they compare free verse, and what I suppose I must call chained verse, they take the greatest example of unrhymed poetry that they can find—the King James version of the Book of Job, perhaps—and say: ‘This is better than “Yankee Doodle.” Therefore, free verse is better than traditional verse.’

“You see,” said Mrs. Marks, “the commonest thing there is, I may say the most democratic

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thing, is the rhythm of the heart-beat. A true poet cannot ignore this. At the greatest times in his life, when he is filled with joy or despair, or when he has a sense of portent, man is aware of his heart, of its beat, of its recurrent tick, tick; he is aware of the rhythm of life. When we are dying, perhaps the only sense that remains with us is the sense of rhythm—the feeling that the grains of sand are running, running, running out.

“The pulse-beat is a tremendous thing. It is the basis of all that men have in common. All life is locked up in its regularly recurrent rhythm. And it is that rhythm that appears in our love-songs, our war-songs, in all the poetry of the human cycle from lullabies to funeral chants. In the great moments of life men feel that they must be sharing, that they must have something in common with other men, and so their emotions crystallize into the ritual of rhythm, which is the most democratic thing that there is.

“Primitive poetry, poetry that comes straight from the hearts of the people, sometimes circulating for generations without being committed to paper, is strongly traditional. The convention of regular rhyme and rhythm is never absent. What could be more conventional and more democratic

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than the old ballad, with its recurrent refrain in which the audience joined? Centuries ago in the Scotch Highlands the ballad-makers, like the men who wrote the 'Come-all-ye's' in our great-grandfather's time, used regular rhyme and rhythm. And if these poets were not democratic, then there never was such a thing as a democratic poet."

"But is it not true," I asked, "that Whitman is considered the most democratic poet of his day, and that his avoidance of rhyme and regular rhythm is advanced as proof of his democracy?"

"Whitman," said Mrs. Marks, "was a democrat in principle, but not in poetic practice. He loved humanity, but he still waits to reach his widest audience because his verse lacks strongly stressed, communal music. The only poems which he wrote that really reached the hearts of the people quickly are those which are most nearly traditional in form—*When Lilacs Last in Door-yards Bloomed* and *Captain, My Captain!* in which he used rhyme.

"You see, nothing else establishes such a bond with memory as rhyme.

"Did you ever think," said Mrs. Marks, suddenly, "that the truest exuberance of life always

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expresses itself rhythmically? Children are generous with the most intricate rhythms; they do not eat ice-cream in the disorderly grown-up way; they eat it in a pattern, turning the saucer around and around; they skit alternate flagstones or every third step on the stairway. Because they are overflowing with life they express themselves in rhythm. *Vers libre* is too grown-up to be the most vital poetry; one of the ways in which the poet must be like a little child is in possessing an exuberance of life. His life must overflow.

“The poets especially remember that Christ said, ‘I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly.’

“The rhythm of life,” said Mrs. Marks, thoughtfully. “The rhythm of life. Who is conscious of his heart-beats except at the great moments of life, and who is unconscious of them then? The music of poetry is the witness of that intense moment when there is discovered to man or woman, when there reverberates through his brain and being, the tremendous rhythm and refrain whereby we live.”

Mrs. Marks has no patience with those who use the term “sociological” in depreciation of all poetry that is not intensely subjective and personal.

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“There are some critics,” she said, “who would condemn the Lord’s Prayer as ‘sociological’ because it begins ‘Our Father’ instead of ‘My Father.’”

“The true poet must be a true democrat; he must, if he can, share with all the world the vision that lights him; he must be in sympathy with the people. The war has made a great many European poets aware of this fact. Think how the war changed Rupert Brooke, for instance? He had been a most aristocratic poet, making poems, some of which could only repel minds less in love with the fantastic. But he shared the great emotion of his countrymen, and so he wrote out of his deeply wakened, sudden simplicity those sonnets which they all can understand and must forever cherish.

“The war will help make poetry. It has swept away the fads and cults from Europe; they find a peaceful haven in the United States, but they will not live as dogmas. In the democracy that is soon to come may all ‘isms’ founder and lose themselves! And may all true freedoms come into their own, with the maker, his mind and his tools.”

THE HERESY OF SUPERMANISM

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

THE HERESY OF SUPERMANISM

CHARLES RANN KENNEDY

“**B**UT, of course,” said Charles Rann Kennedy, violently (he says most things rather violently), “you understand that the war’s most important effect on literature was clearly evident long before the war began!”

I did not understand this statement, and said so. Thereupon the author of *The Servant in the House* and *The Terrible Meek* said:

“We have so often been told that great events cast their shadows before, that the tremendous truth of the phrase has ceased to impress us. The war which began in August, 1914, exercised a tremendous influence over the mind of the world in 1913, 1912, 1911, and 1910. The great wave of religious thought which swept over Europe and America during those years was caused by the approach of the war. The tremendous pacifist movement—not the weak, blood-

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less pacifism of the poltroon, but the heroic, flaming pacifism of the soldier-hearted convinced of sin—was a protest against the menacing injustice of the war; it was the world's shudder of dread.

“The literature of the first decade of the twentieth century was more thoroughly and obviously influenced by the war than will be that of the decade following. Think of that amazing quickening of the conscience of the French nation, a quickening which found expression in the novels of René Bazin, the immortal ballads of Francis Jammes, and in the work of countless other writers! These people were preparing themselves and their fellow-countrymen for the mighty ordeal which was before them.

“It is blasphemous to say that the war can only affect things that come after it; to say that is to attempt to limit the powers of God. There are, of course, some writers who can only feel the influence of a thing after it has become evident; after they have carefully studied and absorbed it. But there are others, the manikoi, the prophetic madmen, who are swayed by what is to happen rather than by what has happened. I'm one of them.

“The war held me in its spell long before the

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German troops crossed Belgian soil. I wrote my *The Terrible Meek* by direct inspiration from heaven in Holy Week, 1912.

"I put that in," said Mr. Kennedy (who looks very much like Gilbert K. Chesterton's *Man-alive*), suddenly breaking off the thread of his discourse, "not only because I know that it is the absolute truth, but because of the highly entertaining way in which it is bound to be misinterpreted.

"New York's dramatic critics, the Lord Chamberlain of England, the military authorities of Germany and Great Britain—all these people were charmingly unanimous in finding *The Terrible Meek* blasphemous, villainous, poisonous. Even the New York MacDowell Club, after two stormy debates, decided to omit all mention of *The Terrible Meek* from its bulletin. Perhaps this was not entirely because the play was 'sacrilegious'; the club may possibly have been influenced by the fact that its author was a loud person with long hair, who told unpleasant truths in reputable gatherings. And copies of the published book of the play, which were accompanied by friendly letters from the author, were refused by every monarch now at war in Europe!

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“But in 1914 and 1915 *The Terrible Meek* suddenly found, to its own amazement, that it had become a respectable play! Its connection with the present war became evident. It has been the subject of countless leading articles; it has been read, and even acted, in thousands of churches. On the occasion of the first production of the despised play in New York City, my wife and I received a small pot of roses from a girls’ school which we sometimes visit. In due time this was planted by the porch of our summer home in Connecticut. This year—three years only after its planting—the rose-tree covers three-quarters of the big porch, and last summer it bore thousands of blooms. Now these things are a parable!

“No, the Lord does not have to wait until the beginnings of mighty wars for them vitally to influence the literature of the world. Upon some of us He places the burden of the coming horror years before.

“Although I am and always have been violently opposed to war, I cannot help observing what this war has already commenced to do for literature. It is killing Supermanism—and I purposely call it by that name to distinguish it from the mere actual doctrine that Nietzsche may or may not

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have taught. The damnable heresy, as it historically happened among us, was already beginning to influence very badly most of our young writers. Clever devilism caught the trick of it too easily. Now, heresy is sin always and everywhere; and this heresy was a particularly black and deadly kind of sin. It ate into the very heart of our life.

“And yet there was a reason, almost an excuse, for the power which the Superman idea got over the minds of writers after Bernard Shaw’s first brilliant and engaging popularization of it. And the excuse is that Supermanism, with its emphasis on strength and courage and life, was to a great extent a healthy and almost inevitable reaction from the maudlin milk-and-water sort of theology and morals that had been apologetically handed out to us by weak-kneed religious teachers.

“We had too much of the ‘gentle Jesus’ of the Sunday-school. In our maze of evil Protestantisms, we had lost sight of the real Son of God who is Jesus Christ. We had lost the terrible and lovely doctrine of the wrath of the Lamb.

“And so a great many writers turned to Supermanism with a shout of relief. They were sick of milk and water, and this seemed to be strong

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wine. But Supermanism is heresy, and it rapidly spread over the world, most perniciously influencing all intellectual life.

“And there were so many things to help Supermanism! There was the general acceptance of the doctrine of biological necessity as an argument for war—Bernhardi actually used that phrase, I believe—the idea that affairs of the spirit are determined exteriorly. There was the acceptance of various extraordinary interpretations of Darwin’s theory of evolution! Every little man called himself a scientist, and took his own little potterings - about very seriously. Everything had to be a matter of observation, these little fellows said; they would believe only what they saw. They didn’t know that real scientists always begin *a priori*, that real scientists always know the truth first and then set about to prove it.

“Well, all these people helped the heresy of Supermanism along. But the people who helped it along chiefly were the apologetic Christians, who should have combated it with fire and sword. It was helped along by the sort of Christian who calls himself ‘liberal’ and ‘progressive,’ the sort of Christian who says, ‘Of couse, I’m not orthodox.’ When any one says that to me, I always answer

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him in the chaste little way which so endears me to my day and generation: 'Hell, aren't you? I hope I am!'

"This sort of so-called Christian helps Supermanism in two ways. In the first place, the 'progressive' Christians are great connoisseurs of heresy, they simply love any new sort of blasphemous philosophy, whether it comes from Germany or Upper Tooting. They love to try to assimilate all the new mad and wicked ideas, and graft them on Christianity. I suppose it's their idea of making the Lord Jesus Christ up to date and attractive. They love to try to engrave pretty patterns on the Rock of Ages. And Supermanism was to them a new and alluring pattern.

"Of course a Supermanism might be worked out on strictly Christian lines, the Superman in that case being the Christ. But that is not the way in which the theory has historically worked out. No! Mr. Superman as we've actually known him in the world recently is the Beast that was taken, and with him the false prophets that wrought miracles before him, with which he had deceived them that had received the mark of the Beast and them that had worshiped his image.

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And these, in the terrible symbolism of St. John, you will remember, got fire and brimstone for their pains! As now!

“Then there was your Christian Supermanism that tried to get up a weak little imitation of the wrath of the Lamb. This was your bastard by theatricality and popularity out of so-called muscular Christianity. Not the virile ‘muscular Christianity’ of Charles Kingsley, mind you—a power he won almost alone, by blood and tears; but the ‘safe’ thing of the after generation, the ‘all things to all men’—when success was well assured. This is your baseball Christianity, the Christianity of the ‘punch,’ of the piled-up heap of dollars, of the commercially counted ‘conversions’ and the rest of the blasphemies! Christ deliver us from it, if needs be, even by fire!

“Well, Supermanism cast its shadow over all forms of literary expression. The big and the little mockers all fell under its spell—they had their fling at Christianity in their novels, their plays, their poems. In the novel Supermanism was evident not so much in direct attacks on Christianity as in a brutal and pitiless realism. Perhaps some of this hard realism was a natural reaction from the eye-piping sentimentality of some of the

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Victorian writers. But most of it was merely Supermanism in fiction—pessimism, egotism, fatalism, cruelty.

“One thing to be said for the Christian Scientists, the Mental Healers, the New Thought people generally, is that they did a real service through all this bad time by refusing to recognize any such heresy as biological determination as applied to things spiritual. They really did teach man’s freedom up there in the heavens where he properly belongs. They refused to be bound by the earth, and all the appearances and the exterior causes thereof. Their Superman, if they ever used the phrase, was at least the Healer, the spirit spent for others, not for self.

“If you were to ask me what were the war’s most conspicuous effects on literature just at present, I would say conviction of sin, repentance and turning to God. There can be no suggestion of Supermanism in our literature now. We have rediscovered the Christian Virtues. If a man writes something about blond-beasting through the world for his own good, all we have to do is to stick up in front of his eyes a crucifix. For the world has seen courage and self-abnegation of the kind that Christ taught—it has seen men

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throw their lives away. The war has shown the world that the man who will throw away his life is braver and stronger and greater than the man who plunges forward to safety over the lives of others. The world has learned that he who loses his life shall gain it.

“The war has thrown a clear light upon Christianity, and now all the little apologetic ‘progressive’ Christians see that the world had never reacted against orthodox Christianity as such, but only against the bowelless unbelief which masqueraded as Christianity. We have had so many ministers who talked about Christ as they would have talked about kippered herrings—even with less enthusiasm. But now any one who speaks or writes about Christianity after this will have to know that he has to do with something terribly real.

“Of course, during the war the only people who can write about it are those who are in the red-hot period of youth. Young men of genius write in times of stress. The war forces genius to flower prematurely—that is how we got the noble sonnets of Rupert Brooke.

“And after the war will come to the making of literature the man who has conquered pain and

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agony. And that is the real Superman, the Christian Superman, the Superman who has always been the normal ideal of the world. Carlyle's Superman was nearer the truth than was Nietzsche's, for Carlyle's Superman idea was grounded in courage and sacrifice and love; his Superman was some one worth fighting for and dying for. And the war is showing us that this is the true Superman, if we want to save the world for nobler ends.

"And the war, I believe, will do away with the tommy-rotten objection to 'message' in literature. Don't misunderstand me. Of course, we all object to the stupid 'story with a purpose' in the Sunday-school sense of that phrase. We don't want literature used as a sugar-coating around the illuminating lesson that God loves little Willie because he fed the dicky-birds and didn't say 'damn'! Yet we want literature to awake again and be as always in the great days—a message. Literature must be a direct message from the heart of the author to the heart of the world. The *Prometheus Vincit* was such a message. So also the *Antigone*. All Greek drama was.

"All the little literary and artistic cults are dead or dying. The idea of literature as a thing

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distinct from life is dead. Writers can never again think of themselves as a race separate from the rest of humanity. All the artificial Bohemias have been destroyed, and can never again exist; for now at last the new world is about to dawn. Christ is coming.

“And yet this war has made evident the importance of literature. It has made words real again. It has shown that men cannot live forever on a lie, written or spoken. God has come upon us like a thief in the night, and He has judged by our words. Some of us He has turned to madness and the vain babblings of heathendom. I am no wild chauvinist; though a man, English-born, it gives me no joy to speak of Germans as Huns, and to heap up hate and indignation against them. Nor in my wildest flights of romanticism can I dream that an England yet possessing Lord Northcliffe and the present Government can be all that God might call delightful. Mr. Superman has invaded England right enough, that I sadly know; and Prussianism is not all in Potsdam.

“Yet it is significant, in view of the Superman's birthplace, in view of the fact that the German people have very largely accepted his doctrine

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and ideal, that the men who stand for speech among them, in their public manifestoes have been delivered over unto confusion and a lie. The logician has been illogical, the literary artist rendered without form and void. Their very craft has turned to impotence and self-destruction. I repeat, this is no happiness to me. Rather, I think of the Germany I have loved, and I weep for the pity of it all. I am no friend of kings and kaisers and bankers and grocers and titled newspaper editors, that I should make their bloodiness mine. But I cannot help but see the sign of God written across the heavens in words of living fire.

“As I said in *The Terrible Meek*: ‘There is great power in words. All the things that ever get done in the world, good or bad, are done by words.’

“What we’ll have to rediscover is that literature, like life, begins with the utterance of a word. And until people realize once again that a word is no mere dead thing buried in a dictionary, but the actual, awful, wonderful Life of God Himself, we shall neither have nor deserve to have a literature!”

THE MASQUE AND DEMOCRACY

PERCY MACKAYE

THE MASQUE AND DEMOCRACY

PERCY MACKAYE

THE community masque, *Caliban by the Yellow Sands*, is primarily intended to honor the memory of Shakespeare on the three-hundredth anniversary of his death. But its significance goes further than the purpose of commemoration. Mr. Percy MacKaye, the author, tells me that he sees his masque as part of a movement which shall bring poetry to the service of the entire community, which shall make poetry democratic, in the best sense of the word, and that the result of this movement will be to create conditions likely to produce out of the soil of America a great renaissance of the drama.

Mr. MacKaye undoubtedly is the busiest poet in the United States of America. When he talked to me about the significance of the community masque, rehearsals of the various groups that are to take part in it were going on all over

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the city. Every few minutes he was called away to confer with some of the directors of the masque, or some of the actors taking part in it. For a while Mr. John Drew was with us, talking of his appearance, in the character of Shakespeare, in epilogue. Mr. Robert Edmund Jones, the designer of the inner scenes, brought over some new drawings, and there were telephone conversations about music and costumes and other important details of the monster production.

“The fact,” said Mr. MacKaye, “that the masque is a poem primarily intended to be heard rather than to be read, is itself a movement toward the earlier and more democratic uses of poetry. Poetry appeals essentially to the ear, and is an art of the spoken word, yet, on account of our conditions of life, the written word is considered poetry.

“This was not true in Shakespeare’s time. And in the sort of work that I am doing is shown a return to the old ideal. A masque is a poem that can be visualized and acted. First of all it must be a poem, otherwise it cannot be anything but a more or less warped work of art.

“With much of the new movement in the theater I am heartily in sympathy; but the movement

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seems to me one-sided. A large part of it has to do with visualization. Emphasis is laid on the appeal to the eye rather than the appeal to the ear, because the men of genius, like Gordon Craig, who have been leaders in the movement, have been interested in that phase of dramatic presentation.

“Now I think that this one-sidedness is regrettable. When Gordon Craig called his book on dramatic visualization *The Art of the Theater* he was wrong. He should have called it ‘An Art of the Theater.’

“These men have neglected part of the human soul. They have forgotten that the greatest part of the appeal of a drama is to the ear. The ear brings up the most subtle of all life’s associations and connotations. By means of the ear the motions and ideas are conjured up in the mind of the audience.

“Now, while the new movement in the theater is visual in character, the new movement in poetry is, so to speak, audible. The American poets are insisting more and more on the importance of the spoken word in poetry, as distinct from its shadow on the printed page. Whether they write *vers libre* or the usual rhymed forms, they appreciate the fact that they must write poems that will

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be effective when read aloud. Surely this is a wholesome movement, likely to tend more and more toward definite dramatic expression on the part of the poets, whether to audiences through actors on the stage, or to audiences gathered to hear the direct utterances of the poets themselves.

“This being so, the stage tending more toward visualization, and poetry tending more and more toward the spoken word, where shall we look for the co-ordinating development? I think that we shall find it in the community masque. The community masque draws out of the unlabored and untrammelled resources of our national life its inspiration and its theme. It requires our young poets to get closely in touch with our national life, with our history and with contemporary attitudes and ideals. To do this it is first of all necessary to have the poetic vision. The great need of the day is of the poet trained in the art of the theater.

“The pageant and the masque offer the ideal conditions for the rendering of poetry. The poet who writes the lyric may or may not ordinarily be the one to speak it. In the masque the one who speaks the poem is the one chosen to do so because of his special fitness for the task. I have

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chosen my actors for the Shakespeare masque with special reference to their ability to speak poetry."

"But what has this to do," I asked, "with making poetry more democratic?"

"For one thing," Mr. MacKaye answered, "it gives the poet a larger audience. People who never read poetry will listen to poetry when it is presented to them in dramatic form. I have found that the result of the presentation of a community masque is to interest in poetry a large number of people who had hitherto been deaf to its appeal. In St. Louis, when I started a masque, that queer word with a 'q' in it was understood by a comparatively small number. But after the masque was produced nearly every high-school boy and girl in the town was writing masques.

"No one can observe the progress of the community masque without seeing that it is surely a most democratic art form. I read my St. Louis masque before assemblies of ministers, in negro high schools, before clubs of advertising-men, at I. W. W. meetings—before men of all conditions of life and shades of opinion. It afforded them a sort of spiritual and intellectual meeting-place, it gave them a common interest. Surely that is a democratic function.

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“The democracy of the masque was forcefully brought to my attention again at the recent dinner by Otto Kahn to the Mayor’s Honorary Committee for the New York Shakespeare Celebration. After James M. Beck had made a speech, Morris Hillquit, also a member of the committee, arose and addressed the company. He pointed out more clearly than I have heard it done before that in this cause extremes of opinion met, that art was producing practical democracy.

“And yet,” said Mr. MacKaye, hastily, “the masque stands for the democracy of excellence, not the democracy of mediocrity. What is art but self-government, the harmonizing of the elements of the mind? There can be no art where there is no discipline, there can be no art where there is not a high standard of excellence.

“As I said,” he continued, “the original appeal of poetry was to the ear as well as to the eye. In the days when poetry was a more democratic art than it has been in our time and that of our fathers, the poet spoke his poems to a circle of enthralled listeners. The masque is spoken through many mouths, but it might be spoken or chanted by the bard himself.

“There has never before been so great an op-

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portunity for the revival of the poetic drama. Ordinarily when a poetic drama is presented the cast has been drawn from actors trained in the rendition of prose. Inevitably the tendency has been for them to give a prose value to the lines of poetry. In selecting a cast for a masque, special attention is given to the ability of the actors to speak poetry, so the poem is presented as the poet intended.

“It may be that the pageant and masque movement represents the full flowering of the renaissance of poetry which all observers of intellectual events have recognized. But these movements are perennial; I do not like to think of a renaissance of poetry because I do not think that poetry has been dead. I feel that it is desirable for the poets to become aware of the opportunities presented to them by the masque, the opportunities to combine the art of poetry with the art of the theater, and thus put poetry at the service of mankind.

“I have felt that the Poetry Society of America, an organization whose activities certainly are stimulating and encouraging to every friend of the art, might serve poetry better if its members were to place more emphasis on creation and less

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on criticism. At their meetings now criticism is the dominant note. Poems written by the members are read aloud and criticized from the floor. This is excellent, in its place, but its effect is to lay stress on the critical function of the poet, which, after all, is not his main function. What the members of the Poetry Society should do is to seek co-operatively to create something. And for this the masque offers them a golden opportunity.

“The flowering of poetry is a thing of infinite variety. There must be variety in a masque if the masque is to continue to be a worthy and popular art form. Standardization would be fatal to the masque, and I have stood out against it with all the power I possess. The masque and the pageant must not degenerate into traveling shows, done according to a fixed receipt. There must be the vision in it, and when the people see the vision they respond marvelously.”

Percy MacKaye is the son of Steele MacKaye, the author of *Hazel Kirke* and other popular plays. From the very beginning of his literary career his chief ambition has seemed to be to bring about a closer *rapprochement* between poetry and the drama.

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When Mr. MacKaye was graduated from Harvard, in 1897, there were in that university no courses, technical or otherwise, in the modern drama. The official acceptance of his own commencement part *On the Need of Imagination in the Drama of To-day* was the first official sanction of the subject, which was commented upon by the *Boston Transcript* as something unprecedented in the annals of university discussion, especially of Harvard. It was not until seven or eight years had passed that Prof. George P. Baker began his courses in dramatic technique.

The development of the pageant and the masque has been for years the object of Mr. MacKaye's tireless endeavors. He has spoken of the masque as "the potential drama of democracy." Two years ago in St. Louis he had his first technical opportunity on a large scale to experiment in devising this sort of communal entertainment. There, during five performances, witnessed by half a million people, some seven thousand citizens of St. Louis took part in his masque, in association with the pageant by Thomas Wood Stevens.

"The outgoing cost of the St. Louis production," said Mr. MacKaye, "was \$122,000; the in-

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come, \$139,000. The balance of \$17,000 has been devoted to a fund for civic art. If these seem large sums, we must look back to the days of the classic Greek drama and remember that the cost of producing a single play by Sophocles at Athens was \$500,000.

“The St. Louis production was truly a drama of, for, and by the people, a true community masque. *Caliban by the Yellow Sands* is a community masque, given as the central popular expression of some hundreds of supplementary Shakespearian celebrations.

“I call this work a masque, because it is a dramatic work of symbolism, involving in its structure pageantry, poetry, and the dance. But I have not thought to relate its structure to a historic form; I have simply sought by its structure to solve a problem of the art of the theater. That problem is the new one of creating a focus of dramatic technique for the growing but groping movement vaguely called ‘pageantry,’ which is itself a vital sign of social evolution—the half-desire of the people not merely to remain receptive to a popular art created by specialists, but to take part themselves in creating it; the desire, —that is, of democracy consistently to seek ex-

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pression through a drama of and by the people, not merely for the people.

“Six years ago, after the pageant-masque of the city of Gloucester, Massachusetts, I wrote, in *Scribner's Magazine*, an article in which I said that I found in the three American pageant-masques which I had seen recently, the Gloucester Pageant, the Masque at Aspet, and the California Redwood Festival, the expression of community spirit focused by co-operating artists in dramatic form. I said then, what I feel even more strongly after my work with the St. Louis Pageant and the Shakespearian Masque, that pageantry is poetry for the masses.

“The parade of Election Day, the processions of Antics and Horribles on the Fourth of July and Thanksgiving Day, the May-Queen rituals of children—these make an elemental appeal to every one. What is this elemental appeal? Is it not the appeal of symbolism, the expression of life's meanings in sensuous form? Crude though it may be, pageantry satisfies an elemental instinct for art, a popular demand for poetry. This instinct and this demand, like other human instincts and demands, may be educated, refined, developed into a mighty agency of civilization.

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Refinement of this deep, popular instinct will result from a rational selection in correlation of the elements of pageantry. Painting, dancing, music, and sculpture (the last as applied to classic groupings) are appropriately the special arts for selecting those elements, and drama is the special art of correlating them.

“The form of pageantry most popular and impressive in appeal as a fine art is that of the dramatic pageant, or masque. It is not limited to historic themes. All vital modern forces and institutions of our nation might appropriately find symbolic expression in the masque.

“And in this would be seen the making of art democratic. Thus would the art of poetry and the art of the drama be put at the service of mankind. Artistic gifts, which now are individualized and dispersed, would be organized to express the labors and aspirations of communities, reviving, for the noblest humanism of our own times, the traditions of Leonardo da Vinci, Ben Jonson, and Inigo Jones. The development of the art of public masques, dedicated to civic education, would do more than any other agency to provide popular symbolic form and tradition for the stuff of a noble national drama. The present theaters

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cannot develop a public art, since they are dedicated to a private speculative business. The association of artists and civic leaders in the organization of public masques would tend gradually to establish a civic theater, owned by the people and conducted by artists, in every city of the nation.

"I expressed these ideas," said Mr. MacKaye, "some years ago, before the pageant movement had reached its present pitch of popularity. All my experiences since that time have given me a firmer conviction that the masque is the drama of democracy, and I believe that the chief value of the Shakespearian masque is as a step forward in the progress of the co-operative dramatic and poetic expression of the people.

"*Caliban by the Yellow Sands* will be given at the City College Stadium May 23d, 24th, 25th, 26th, and 27th. After its New York performance it will be available for production elsewhere on a modified scale of stage performance. After June 1st it is planned that a professional company, which will co-operate with the local communities, will take the masque on tour.

"The subtitle of *Caliban by the Yellow Sands* is *A Community Masque of the Art of the Theater*,

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Devised and Written to Commemorate the Tercentenary of the Death of Shakespeare. The dramatic-symbolic motive of the masque I have taken from Scene 2 of Act I of *The Tempest*, where Prospero says:

It was mine art
When I arrived and heard thee, that made gape
The pine and let thee out.

“The art of Prospero I have conceived as the art of Shakespeare in its universal scope—that many-visioned art of the theater, which age after age has come to liberate the imprisoned imagination of mankind from the fetters of brute force and ignorance; that same art which, being usurped or stifled by groping part-knowledge, prudery, or lust, has been botched in its ideal aims, and has wrought havoc, hypocrisy, and decadence. Caliban is in this masque that passionate child-curious part of us all, groveling close to his origin, yet groping up toward that serener plane of pity and love, reason, and disciplined will, on which Miranda and Prospero commune with Ariel and his spirits.

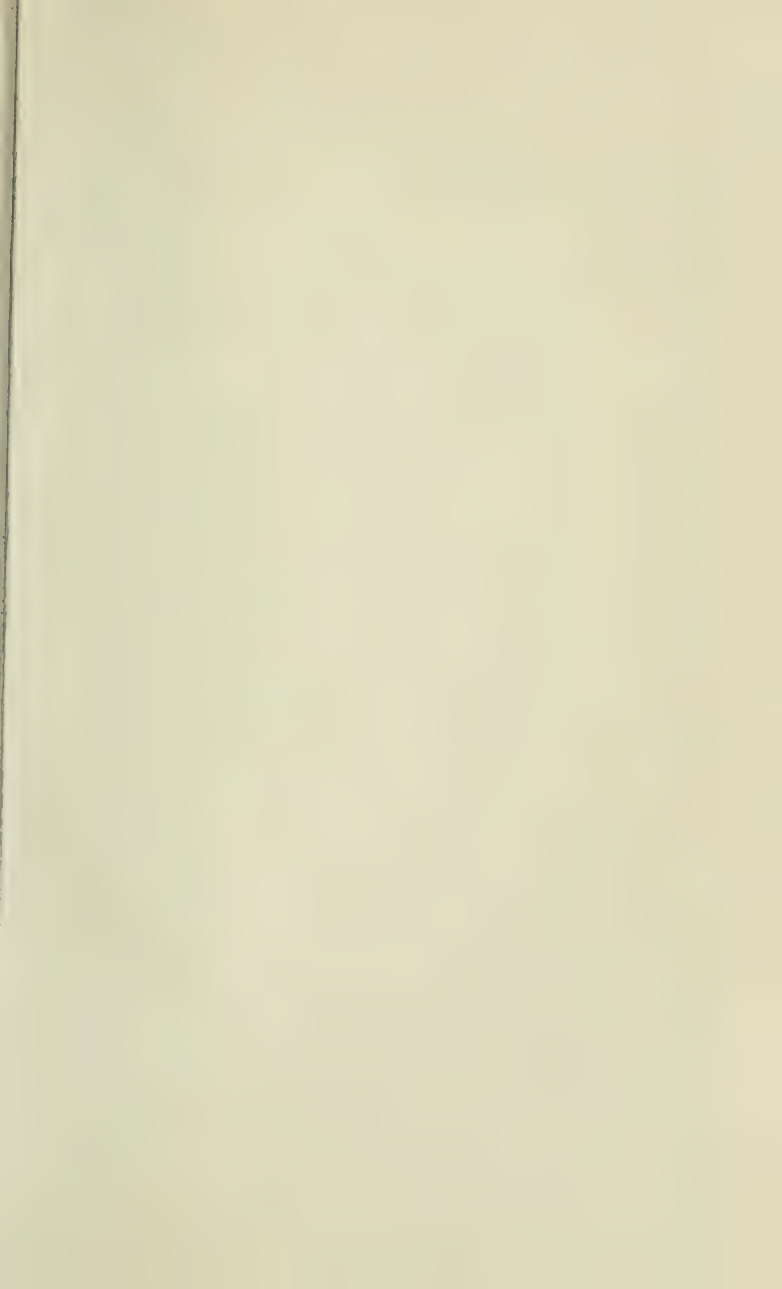
“The theme of the masque—Caliban seeking to learn the art of Prospero—is, of course, the slow education of mankind through the influences of

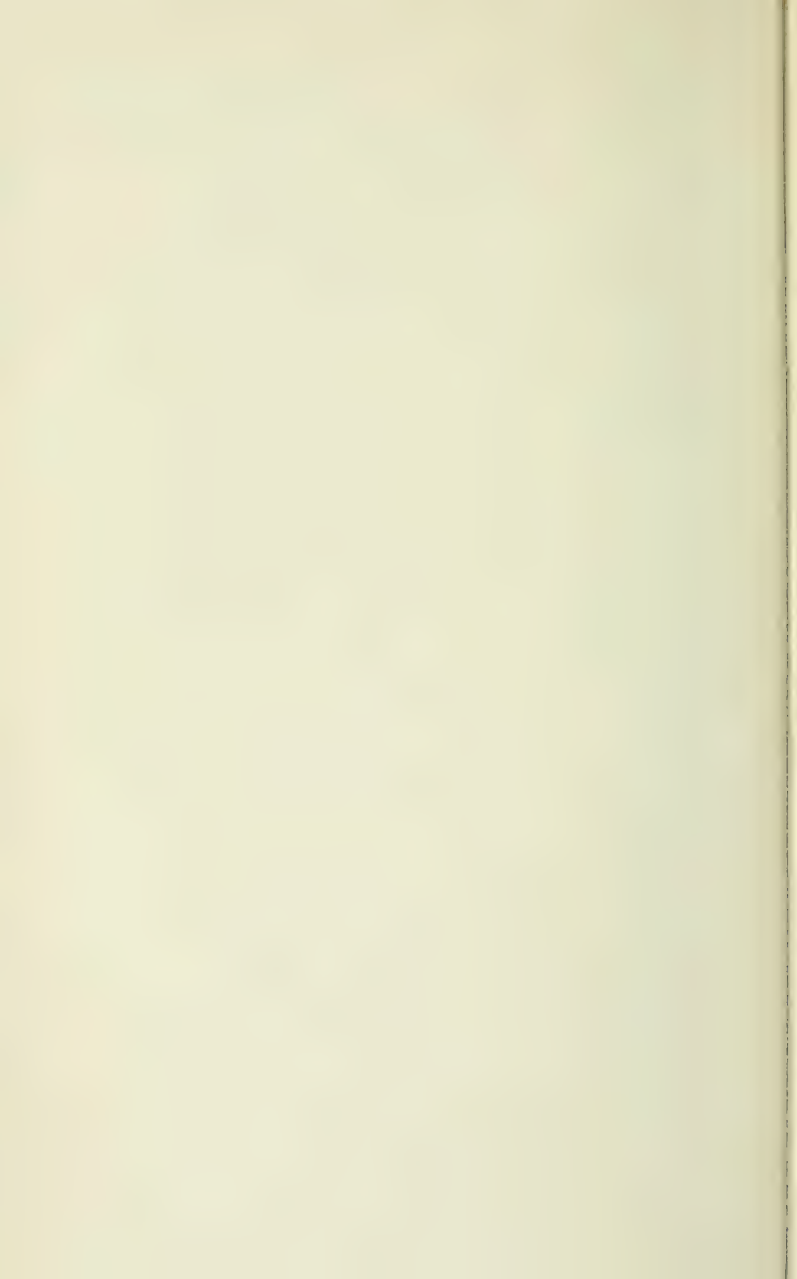
MASQUE AND DEMOCRACY

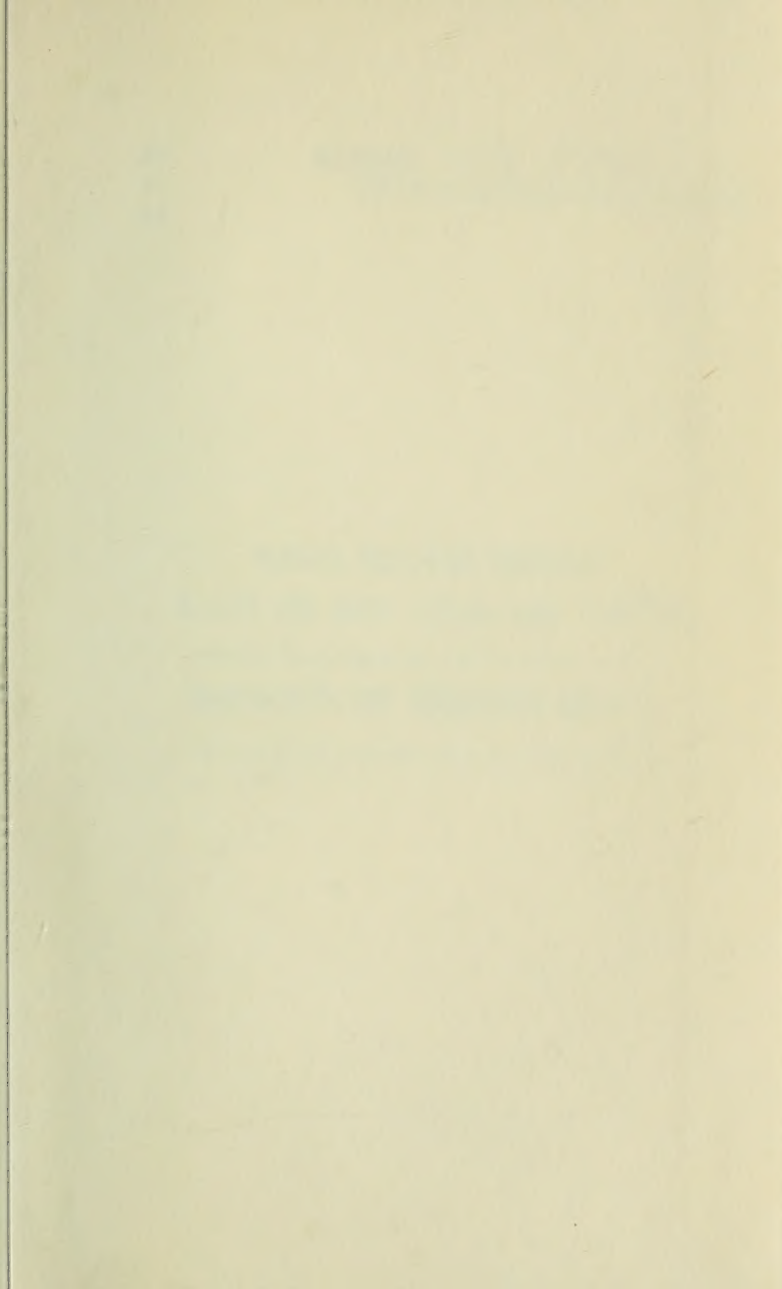
co-operative art—that is, of the art of the theater in its full social scope. This theme of co-operation is expressed earliest in the masque through the lyric of Ariel's Spirits taken from *The Tempest*; it is sounded, with central stress, in the chorus of peace when the kings clasp hands on the Field of the Cloth of Gold; and, with final emphasis, in the gathering together of the creative forces of dramatic art in the Epilogue.

“So I have tried to make the masque bring that message of co-operation which I think all true art should bring. And the masque is the form which seems to me destined to bring about this desired co-operation, to bring back, perhaps, the conditions which existed in the spacious days of the great Greek drama. The growth in popularity of masques and pageants is preparing the way for a new race of poet dramatists, of poets who will use their knowledge of the art of the theater to interpret the people to themselves. And out of this new artistic democracy will come, let us hope, our new national poetry and our new national drama.”

THE END







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